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EASY EYE™

DOROTHY DANIELS

CLIFFSIDE CASTLE
Sudden, mysterious deaths had left Nancy Furnivall orphaned and alone. And now she had to find a hidden killer—before he struck again!

CLIFFSIDE CASTLE

DOROTHY DANIELS

LANCER EASY EYE™ EDITIONS

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A LANCER BOOK

CLIFFSIDE CASTLE

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ONE

I STOOD at the forward rail of the sailing vessel which had been my home for what seemed to me to be a period of many months. As it sailed serenely into New York harbor in June 1890, I saw my first steamships which plied the Atlantic, but I hadn't come from Europe. Mine had been one of the last voyages made by sailing vessels from China—around the Horn and up the Atlantic coastline. It had been an interminable voyage for every passenger on board, but an agonizing one for me because the days and nights were lonely and I had too much time to reminisce.

It had been fourteen years since I had seen the United States. I was only five when Papa and Mama left for China to take over a medical missionary hospital there. Had it not been for Mama's insistence that I speak English all the time I was in my parents' presence, I should very likely be speaking only Chinese by now, for I had grown up with Chinese children and been raised by Auntie Tang, a Chinese woman who all but adopted me.

Now Auntie Tang was dead. Mama and Papa were dead, and I was alone and frightened. My entire adult life had been spent in China where things had been quiet and peaceful until the war lords moved in on our province; but I was now faced with the mad rushing cosmopolitan activities which I already saw on the docks.

And there seemed to be so many people, so many carriages. The buildings frightened me, too, for they appeared very large to me, and the clatter of a horsecar along the dockside street made me sure I would never ride on one. Later, when I saw the elevated trains belching out sparks and smoke, I knew the horsecars were already obsolete, but, at that moment, they represented progress far beyond anything I had ever known.

I clung to the rail with both hands and wished I could remain on the ship for the rest of my life even though I had hated it. I'd proved to be, not only a poor sailor, but I had been quite unable to mix with the other passengers. I was too shy, too worried, too upset. I'd remained in my cabin and read and reread the ship's library. I contrived to be first in the dining room where I ate hastily; I left before it began to grow crowded. My walks on deck were taken after everyone else had retired, and even then I had to keep watch against the appearance of the ship's officers, most of whom were young and not above attempting to establish an acquaintanceship.

I knew my behavior was hardly normal for a young girl. I could have had a wonderful time on that ship, but I was traveling alone and my upbringing had been such that I was expected to be on my most con-

ventional behavior at all times. A medical missionary's daughter is not permitted much leeway. As a result of my avoidance of crew and passengers, they all came to respect my wishes for privacy and I was left strictly to myself.

My baggage was being taken ashore for me and all I carried was the carpetbag in which my most precious possessions were kept. I looked down at the crowded docks, wondering who, of all these people, was waiting to greet me. I hoped it was Uncle Aaron, Papa's older brother. Or even Cousin Clara who was Aaron's only daughter. Clara's mother had died some time before. I remember how my own mother cried when she got the letter telling her about it. There was no one else that I knew of who was interested in me.

I was going to live with Uncle Aaron and Cousin Clara somewhere along the Hudson River. I had studied the geography of the United States aboard ship so I knew where the Hudson was. I wished the ship could have navigated up the river and landed at some quiet port instead of this confusing madhouse.

To get my mind off my fears, I turned to look at the Statue of Liberty—only four years old. We had passed close by it and, while I had never even heard of it until I was on shipboard, I, nevertheless, felt a wonderful warmth in knowing that I was part of the country it represented.

But the time came soon enough when I could delay no longer for almost everyone had gone ashore. I walked slowly to the gangplank. The crowd below had thinned out; the line of carriages had dwindled

to three or four. I was suddenly panic-stricken as the thought occurred to me that, possibly, there was no one waiting for me. What would I do in this huge strange city? Where would I go?

Someone called, "Nancy Furnivalll I am looking for Nancy Furnivall."

I whirled about. A young man was walking along the deck in my direction. I had never before laid eyes on him, but he would have caught my attention even had he been in a crowd. He was tall, almost six feet, I judged. He was very well turned-out and quite handsome with an infectious smile. His bright gray eyes were searching for me. They rested on me and I thought I saw a look of disappointment cross his face. Then the smile came back and he moved up to me quickly.

"You must be Nancy," the young man said. "There's no one else left on board."

"Yes," I said uneasily, "I am Nancy Furnivall."

"Good. Let me take your bag."

"No, thank you," I said promptly, and clung to the carpetbag more tightly.

He doffed his hat and bowed slightly, "I am very sorry, Miss Furnivall. I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Raymond Hayes and I am an attorney for a law firm that represents your—ah—uncle. I was asked to meet you."

"Couldn't Uncle Aaron come himself? Or Cousin Clara?"

"I'm sorry. It was impossible. So I am here in their place and I shall see that you are safely conducted to a very nice hotel——"

"A hotel?" I cried. "But I am supposed to go at once to Uncle Aaron——"

"I know, my dear Miss Furnivall, but his home is eighty miles from here and you will have to take a steam locomotive. There are none until morning. You can't just sit on a park bench all night now, can you?"

I fashioned a sickly little smile. "I suppose not, sir. You will have to understand that all this is very novel to me. I have lived in China most of my life and this—this——"I waved my hand at the dock "—is—is—confusing——"

Mr. Hayes laughed. "I should think it might be. But imagine if I set foot in China? I'd be just as lost as you. I am equally sure if I did, you would put me at ease and see to it that I soon learned my way. That is what I shall do for you, Miss Furnivall. It will indeed be a pleasure."

"I don't understand——" I said nervously.

"First, I shall see that you are properly registered at a hotel. Then, after you have a suitable time to rest and to dress, I shall take you to Delmonico's to dine. We shall then take a carriage and tour the streets so you may see all the sights. And in the morning I shall put you aboard your train to your uncle's house. You will be met at the station; that's all there is to it. You will be protected every inch of the way."

I liked him. I had known very few American young men and they had been missionaries, too staid to more than glance at me. Perhaps I was not able to —well—judge men such as Mr. Hayes, but I be-

lieved him to be honest and good. I knew he was kind and attentive.

"Thank you," I said, and surrendered my bag. "I would enjoy that."

There was a carriage waiting, not a hired one, and it was most comfortable and clean. Mr. Hayes helped me onto the seat and then climbed aboard to sit beside me. The coachman had already taken my bag.

The horse was spirited, used to city noises, and set off at a brisk trot. I was suddenly amazed to find myself riding along a paved street with houses on either side which reached up sometimes for five and six stories. They all looked the same and the thought of living in one of them had little appeal for me.

Then we came to an avenue lined with several stores; they simply struck me dumb with astonishment for I never knew that anything like this existed. Above me, and, it seemed, everywhere, electric light wires festooned the roughhewn poles.

"They're not very pretty, are they?" Raymond Hayes grimaced as he, too, studied the wires.

"I have never seen anything like this before," I replied honestly. "I cannot judge."

"We're putting them underground," he explained. "In a few more years they will have vanished, I hope."

I did more staring than talking, although I found Mr. Hayes a very agreeable young man who was easy to converse with. Yet all that I saw, the new things, the strange things, attracted and held my interest so greatly that I could only marvel at them in silence.

Then the carriage pulled up before a great building, the likes of which I had never seen before, and two uniformed men hurried from the doorway, across the sidewalk, and stood ready to help us down and to take our luggage.

I learned that this was the Waldorf Hotel, one of the finest in the world. When I entered the lobby, I was sure it must be a mandarin's palace, decorated in American style. I gasped at the sheer luxuriousness and beauty of it. The enormous chandeliers, the thick cushioned rugs underfoot, the bright plush-covered furniture and, especially, the ladies and gentlemen who moved about amidst all this splendor with such poise one would deem each of them owned the hostelry.

Mr. Hayes saw to it that I signed the register and a bellboy took me to my room. Later, I learned the bellboy had been tipped in advance for I had never heard of the custom and Mr. Hayes must have guessed that.

My room was huge, high-ceilinged, with an enormous bed and a large dresser. There were mirrors and chairs and a private bathroom. Suddenly it occurred to me what I had been missing in life by living in China for so many years.

I quickly changed into a more suitable dress. I did know about styles for Mama had been quite fashion-conscious even in faraway, heathen China, and she saw to it that she received the latest magazines and patterns, and often spent hours at a sewing machine which had been sent all the way from Hong Kong making elaborate clothes.

So I did know how to dress and I was gaining some

self-confidence, thanks to Mr. Hayes's patience and kindness. I even applied a chamois and dusted rice powder to my cheeks; then I brightened them a bit by pinching.

While I wasn't a beauty, I knew I wasn't ugly. I had light brown hair and gray eyes. My chin was firm and well-shaped and so were my ears, which were small and set close to my head. I was slim, five-feet-two, and my ankles were slender and trim. There were, in this great city, thousands upon thousands of far more beautiful girls, to be sure, but I was grateful for whatever physical assets I had been blessed with.

I was very pleased when I saw the expression of open admiration on Mr. Hayes's face as he greeted me in the lobby. I didn't think he had recognized me at first, though he had looked my way with considerable interest. Then his features brightened and he smiled broadly as he hurried toward me.

"I do declare," Mr. Hayes said, "you have not only removed all traces of travel fatigue, but brightened the whole world as well. Will you take my arm, Miss Furnivall? It is time for dinner."

I hadn't even noticed that it had grown dark, but when the lights came on, I marveled again. This was truly a different world from the one I'd grown used to, and now I realized how much Mama and Papa had given up to travel afar and care for heathens who, in the end, turned on their benefactors.

"You are very quiet, Miss Furnivall," Mr. Hayes commented.

"I am, indeed, and I apologize," I said quickly.

"But I was thinking what all this means and how much I have missed in life. In China, especially the outlying provinces where Papa worked, there was nothing. We were lucky to have oil for our lamps and something besides rice for supper."

"Tonight, you shall have far more than rice," he smiled. "We are going to Delmonico's. It is one of the most famous restaurants in the world, and with good reason. There you will see real luxury and eat as you never have before."

The carriage stopped before the large building which glistened with light. More attendants sprang to attend us and Mr. Hayes finally gave me his arm and we walked into the most lavishly decorated establishment I had ever seen.

The mandarins' palaces I had been allowed to visit were as nothing compared to this. And, everywhere, well-groomed men and women were quietly going about the pleasurable business of dining in this opulent atmosphere. There seemed naught for me to do but enjoy it, too, and I made up my mind that I would do my utmost to lose my shyness, that I would be a good conversationalist, and that I would watch and adopt the mannerisms and the polite gestures of the other ladies. I did know how to conduct myself at mealtime, even here, for Mama had taught me that.

But I should have known all of this would scarcely last long, or wouldn't be marred with unpleasant news, for I came to learn later that Mr. Hayes had been under instructions to treat me with great consideration and kindness before he broke the bad

news. He waited until we were having coffee before he told me that Uncle Aaron had been dead a year and a half.

I slowly set down my cup. It rattled slightly against the saucer as my trembling hand released it.

"Uncle Aaron is dead? But—but the last we heard——"

"I know, dear Miss Furnivall," Mr. Hayes said, "but China is a long way off and the mails are very uncertain. We wrote your father, but the letter was returned to us with a notation that he could not be located. By the time we were about to institute a search for him, we received word of the uprising and we knew there was nothing we could do until things settled down. They never did, it seems. Then we received word of your father's death; also, a letter from him entrusting you to the care of his brother Aaron, and to us. Aaron had died some time before."

"But what am I to do then?" I asked. "I have no one. Oh—I am sorry, I had forgotten Cousin Clara."

"Yes, there is Clara. She still lives in the great old house Uncle Aaron bought many years back. Clara is—well—a rather retiring sort of girl, but I'm sure you will enjoy making her acquaintance."

"At least," I said, "I have kin to go to."

"There's more to it, Miss Furnivall. A year before he died, your Uncle Aaron married again."

"Oh! That is surprising," I said.

"Yes, I suppose so, for it surprised us as well, and we are a staid and not easily astonished law firm. He married a widow, quite a lovely-looking woman, I must say. She has a son. I believe his name is Cornel-

ius Pitman. I have seen him, but not met him, so I cannot enlighten you regarding him. Be that as it may, you do seem to have more relatives than Cousin Clara to live with."

"Perhaps I'll be glad he married again. I am in need of guidance, Mr. Hayes. This may be my native country, but I'm a total stranger here. However, I will not have to depend upon their charity. You do know about the Buddha?"

He looked off into the distance, "Oh yes. Yes, I heard of the Buddha."

"Papa was a doctor, you know. A very good one. Among his patients was Quan Lee Tong, a mandarin of enormous wealth. Papa saved his life—so the mandarin believed. He suffered from a tumor that required an operation which went splendidly, and, from then on, Papa was regarded as a god. The mandarin called us to his palace when he was fully recovered, and he asked Papa what he wished in the way of a fee, and Papa said he asked for nothing—that it had been his Christian duty to treat the mandarin and if he would only think about embracing Christianity, that would be sufficient payment. The mandarin thought that was so generous a statement that he caused one of his most priceless possessions to be delivered to papa."

"That's quite a romantic story," Mr. Hayes said, but I could find no enthusiasm in his voice.

"Oh, it is, Mr. Hayes," I said. "When Papa finally examined the Buddha, he discovered it was solid gold. And it required two men to lift it. Also, the eyes and the nails were superb precious rubies. The mandarin had given Papa a fortune."

Mr. Hayes looked at me most seriously. "Miss Furnivall, that is one of the things I have been instructed to speak to you about. I'm afraid——"

I could feel my heart sinking. There was something wrong. My whole life and future depended upon that golden Buddha, for Papa had estimated its value as being sufficient to keep me for years, if not the remainder of my life, in comfort and security. Yet, by the look on Mr. Hayes's face and the tone of his voice, I knew this news would be as bad as that concerning Uncle Aaron.

"Was it—lost?" I asked. "Did it not arrive? Papa never heard——"

"It arrived, but—it was valueless. A fine ornament, but not of precious metal set with gems, as your father had indicated in his letter. Somehow, he was either deceived by that mandarin or—the idol was stolen and this imitation substituted."

"But why didn't Uncle Aaron let Papa know? There was time for that——"

"Your Uncle Aaron was a sick man at that time. He accepted the idol as genuine and placed it in a storage vault in his home. It lies there yet, a gross, heavy thing worth—about a thousand American dollars."

I was close to tears, but I dared not give way in the elaborate restaurant. I wondered, childishly, if that were the reason Mr. Hayes had brought me here—so that I'd be unable to cry and carry on. In any event, I should only have wept quietly. Not because the idol was all but worthless, not because Papa had been either cheated or the victim of theft, but because he had had such an abiding faith in the idea of that idol

representing something substantial which he could leave to me. Had I cried, my tears would not have been those of selfishness, but rather of pity and sorrow for my dead father.

"I'm quite all right," I assured the attorney. "The news is shocking, I must say, but I have undergone so much during the past two years another blow cannot make me feel that all is hopeless."

"You will not be in want," Mr. Hayes said. "I assure you that will never happen."

"What is my present worth then?" I asked him. "All my father's papers were sent to Uncle Aaron and I do presume you must have received them in his name. Or someone did."

"His widow turned them over to us. Your worth? Not much more than the thousand dollars which represents the value of the Buddha."

"I will not be dependent upon my uncle's widow," I said firmly.

"She has little more than you, Miss Furnivall. Your Uncle Aaron left everything he owned, without restrictions, to his daughter—your Cousin Clara."

"For Clara's sake, I'm quite happy about that," I said. "Of course, I cannot remember Clara except that she did seem to be rather quiet and shy."

"She has become a virtual recluse. No one knows why. But I did speak with her and she asked me to inform you that whatever she has is yours and you may be assured she spoke in all sincerity. Clara is not given to whims of fancy."

"Even so," I said, "I shall not——"

"Miss Furnivall," the solicitor broke in on me, "what will you do? What can you do? In this modern

world, there is hardly a place for a sheltered girl who was brought up in China, the daughter of a medical missionary and his wife. You have had no training, you possess no skills."

"I shall find something," I said stubbornly.

"There are few openings for a cultured, carefully reared girl. Tutoring—but what can you teach? Chinese? Give music lessons? I doubt you know modern music or even the modern instruments. Tend the sick? Perhaps, as you are the daughter of a doctor—but the life of a nurse is not a pleasant one, nor an easy one."

He was telling me the truth as he saw it and I appreciated both his effort and his wisdom, for what he said did sound quite true.

"What then, do you suggest, Mr. Hayes?" I asked.

"Well," he said with an impish smile, "the easiest way is to get married—and I do assure you that would not be a difficult thing for a girl as charming and attractive as you. Now, I see that you blush easily, which is a fine trait and I admire it, but I shall not pursue the topic which, I am afraid, may have sounded more facetious than I so intended."

"At least," I said, "you have made me smile."

"Good. My considered advice is quite simple. Go to your Uncle Aaron's estate and stay there for a time. At least, until you settle yourself. It may be that Cousin Clara will need you. It may be that you will like Lillian Furnivall very much. You do owe them the courtesy of an extended visit, and after that, you can make up your mind."

"Thank you, Mr. Hayes," I said. "I feel much bet-

ter. It is a strange sensation—so much has happened to me in the past hour."

"May I ask what you mean?"

"Of a certainty. I was so frightened of the city and my own country that I didn't want to get off the boat. Then, viewing the people, the buildings, and the carriages, the seemingly frenzied activity redoubled my fears. Next, I encountered the luxury you introduced me to and which I found quite fascinating. Finally the shock of the news about my position. This frightening news—no, not entirely so—for, with it, I have come to realize that I am quite alone in this world and I must make my own way. That knowledge has given me courage. So have you, Mr. Hayes, and I shall be eternally grateful."

"I'm glad," he acknowledged my gratitude. "Tomorrow I'll escort you to the train and see to your comfort. On the week end, I shall pay an official visit to Cliffside Castle——"

"'Cliffside Castle,'" I repeated. "I'd forgotten that that is what Uncle Aaron called his estate. "Please do, by all means, Mr. Hayes. I shall look forward to renewing your acquaintance."

"Your words please me," the young lawyer said, smiling. "For tonight, I shall endeavor to help you forget the dismaying news I was forced to relate to you. I wish to take you for a drive uptown as far as Forty-fifth Street. There is a great deal to see which, I believe, will interest you."

"Now that I have gotten over my fright, I find New York City quite fascinating. I only wish I had time to explore it more thoroughly."

"I'm sure that can be arranged," Mr. Hayes replied in friendly fashion. "As for myself, I am most eager to hear of your life in China. I know it will take a great deal of time to describe it, and I hope you will set aside some of your leisure to inform me of what life in the Orient was like."

I suppressed a shudder as I said, "My dear Mr. Hayes, since I left the Far East, I have endeavored to shut out my past. All of it. I had to do so because it was the only way I could keep from thinking of what happened to Mama and Papa. It was so horrible—so incredibly shocking that——"

He placed his hand lightly over mine which rested on the table. "Pray, say no more. I understand."

"Thank you, sir," I said gratefully, calming under his gentle manner. "And now, I am quite ready to take in the sights of this great city."

TWO

THEY WERE out there, hundreds of them. Warlord troops sworn to drive every white man from China. When they were ready, they would come in one gigantic irresistible mass. The mission gates were closed, and the walls were manned by half a dozen sailors. The door would go down under the assault in scant minutes; the sailors would die trying to stem the tide of the assault, but not a hundred times their number could have defended us successfully. The Chinese mass attack walked over its own dead and never stopped.

Somewhere on the river, a mile behind the mission, an American gunboat was trying to reach us. The Captain had sent these half a dozen sailors ahead to do what they could, but it was not going to be a triumphant defense.

Papa emerged from the bedroom with Mama. He was a mild-mannered man, but big enough to make his authority felt. Mama had never looked more beautiful to me. She was as fair as I, but far more

attractive; she didn't look old enough to have had her first child, let alone a daughter of eighteen.

I was more frightened than my parents for I lacked the confidence they possessed. I feared that silent horde out in the darkness. I loathed the warlords because I knew what they were capable of. We were doomed. There was nowhere to run except to the river and that was no refuge unless the gunboat arrived to challenge the Chinese warlord troops with its big guns.

I thought Mama had been crying, but she smiled now and sat down beside me.

"You are not to worry, Nancy," Mama said. "You are to do exactly as we tell you. Exactly, do you understand?"

"Yes, Mama," I said.

"When the time comes, you will slip out a back window and make your way to the river. There, you will find somewhere to hide. There is no one to send with you and we cannot go. Our place is here with the mission. Therefore, you must be very brave and go alone."

"I shall do what you wish of me," I said obediently, "though I would far rather remain with you."

"It is out of the question. You must flee and hide and remain hidden for some time. If the soldiers come, don't let them see you. The gunboat will get here, but it may not be for a day or two. We shall hold out here. We can keep them off until the boat arrives, but, when it does, you must be there to tell them about us. That is your role in this struggle, my dear."

Old Qua Ling, the gardener, came scurrying into the house and spoke to Papa in whispers. Papa nodded and called one of the sailors to his side. They held a brief conference and the sailor looked worried and alarmed, but he returned to his post. Papa came over to Mama and I.

"Nancy," he said, "you must go now. At once! It is dark enough. Run as you have never run before. Take care that no one sees you. Here is a small bundle of rice and some of the Christmas candy we have left. That will sustain you."

"And I will tell the sailors on the gunboat to hurry when they arrive," I promised.

"Exactly. You are our only hope." Papa's arms enclosed me and he gave me a hasty kiss. "Say farewell to your mother, then go. God go with you, my dear daughter."

He left the room with rapid steps and Mama took me in her arms for a few seconds; then she accompanied me to the rear window through which I must climb so that we wouldn't have to unlock and open the door.

The moment my feet touched the ground, I started to run, and I kept running until the bright moon-bathed waters of the river were within sight. It was then that I slowed and stopped to regain my breath. Distantly, I could hear the sound of much shooting. I looked back and I could see flames, rising higher and higher.

I knew what had happened. Papa had sent me out alone. If the three of us had gone, the war-lord troops would have searched for us, but they might not miss one girl. Papa and Mama had told me to bring the

men from the gunboat, but they knew the help would arrive much too late to save their lives or the mission.

I reached the riverbank and found refuge under a rotted wharf, but, even there, huddled against the cold and dampness of the river, I could see the ever-mounting fires. The shooting had stopped. That meant the mission was no longer able to defend itself. Everyone I knew there was dead.

I sobbed bitterly; for a time, I didn't care if I were discovered. But then I realized Papa and Mama had died to give me a chance to live, and, if I gave up, I would dishonor their memory and make their sacrifice worthless.

However, the war-lord troops did miss me, it seemed. For they came searching. They poked their bayoneted rifles everywhere, and a dozen of them were so close to me I could hear their raucous breathing and their muttered threats about what they would do when they found me.

I lay out of sight, half covered by the dirty river water, cold, wet to the skin, and losing hope swiftly for I knew they'd never give up until they found me. With daylight, my refuge would not be secure and the gray dawn was already creeping beneath the wharf.

I saw two of the soldiers walking toward me. As the darkness gave way to morning light, they saw the old pier and they had come to investigate it. Now, I would be found and I would be killed. They came closer and closer, their yellow faces alight in the eager hope that they would be the first to find me.

I kept the knuckles of one hand hard against my

lips to keep from screaming. They began to chatter wildly. While I understood Chinese, this was a strange dialect to me although I did grasp enough of the words to realize they had found footprints in the mud and they must know exactly where I was.

It was over now. They had found my hiding place and I was revealed to them. I planned to slide down beneath the water as far as I could and let myself drown. I was saying my prayers, asking forgiveness for what I was about to do—and then the big gun on the gunboat sent a shell roaring in over my head. It crashed somewhere near the mission.

The two Chinese war-lord soldiers paid no attention to the gunboat or the shell. Their rifles were aimed at me and they were indicating I was to get out of the water or they would shoot me.

Their threatening, vicious faces grew larger and uglier and I cried out repeatedly, but no help came. . . .

I found myself sitting up in bed. The room was dark and terrifying. I didn't know where I was. My throat was dry, but my face was covered with the perspiration of terror. That terrifying dream kept coming back, and it seemed to grow more real with each recurrence.

I drew a sharp breath as awareness of my surroundings returned. I wondered with embarrassment if my cries had awakened anyone in the hotel as they had while I was aboard the sailing vessel on my way home.

Perhaps the noises out on the streets had drowned out my cries. Those city sounds were a great comfort

to me for they told me very quickly that I was safe and I was surrounded by civilization—that the two leering war-lord troops now existed only in my mind—for the gunboat had killed both of them as they fled.

I'd been taken aboard the boat and a party was sent ashore, but, whatever they had found, no one told me about it, except to say that my father and mother had died bravely.

I slipped out of bed, went into the bathroom and had a drink of water to quench my thirst. Then I stood beside the window and looked down. I'd never been so high above the earth before. I knew I was safe, and I knew I was fortunate. I was aware also that no matter what was in store for me, I'd face it as bravely as Mama and Papa had faced death.

There would be many times when I'd be frightened again, but no fear could ever be as great as that which I'd endured, half-submerged in dirty water, while the soldiers came to kill me.

Not even the loss of my inheritance mattered, for it was insignificant compared to the fact that I lived and I was safe. I went back to bed and lay quietly, wondering what the future held for me—wondering what Uncle Aaron's wife Lillian was like—if she and her son would like me. If Clara were the same quiet girl she used to be. If Cliffside were the same vast, gloomy, shadow-filled house of fifty-odd rooms with a hundred crevices and cupboards set on a rambling estate atop a cliff that overlooked the Hudson River.

THREE

I QUICKLY adjusted myself to the steam-locomotive ride and I enjoyed it, despite the soot and cinders that flew in through the wide-open windows.

Raymond Hayes had come for me the following morning and placed me aboard the train. He, himself, would journey to Cliffside in a few days, for there was still a great deal of legal work to be done in connection with Uncle Aaron's estate. He had been most kind to me and I looked forward to his visit. Perhaps, by then, I should have made up my mind about what I would do with my personal future.

So I resolved to enjoy myself as much as the circumstances permitted. I wanted to see Clara again. I hoped that Lillian would like me, and that Cornelius would turn out to be gentlemanly and understanding.

The scenery whizzed by. The train made a number of stops at small stations and I was intensely interested in watching the people who came to meet

it. Here, I was no alien as I had been in China. This was my own country, and I was glad I was home.

When the train reached the station at Cliffside, I was the only passenger who got off. The conductor graciously assisted me with my heavy luggage and left it on the little platform. As the train pulled out of the station, I looked about for someone who should be there to meet me.

Then, a black-and-red buggy swept down the street at a great rate of speed, the coal-black horse running as if in a race. In the buggy was a young man in a brown cap and gray sweater; he was urging the horse to more and more speed.

The driver pulled up, finally, in a great cloud of dust and hopped out of the buggy to rush up to me. Now, I could see that he was about twenty-two, a slender, lithe young man. He had deep-brown eyes, brown hair, and a chin in which the cleft grew deeper when he smiled.

"I'll be darned," he said admiringly. "You're a very pretty girl, Nancy. You don't look Chinese in the least."

I laughed at him and with him, and we shook hands quite formally. He was, of course, Cornelius, or Neil, Pitman, whose mother had married Uncle Aaron.

Neil carried my baggage and stowed it into the back of the buggy, tying it on securely. Then he helped me aboard; soon we were moving away from the sleepy little village which hadn't even yawned when I arrived in its midst.

I did like the neat houses and the farms which extended behind each one. There seemed to be so

many different flowers growing in every front yard. In China, each foot of earth was cultivated for crops. Even then, the people starved. Land was so wonderfully profuse here.

"You must have been surprised to learn your uncle was dead. And, also, that he had married again," Neil said.

"I was indeed, sir. I was shocked at the news of his death. Would you tell me about it?"

"He'd been ill a long time. It was his heart. He died quietly and, I'm sure, in no pain. He used to mention you and your father and mother often."

"He and Papa were very close," I said. "It was strange, too, for they were quite different types. Aaron was wealthy and was engaged in numerous business enterprises. Papa lived only for his medicine and the people he could help. The more they were in need of a doctor, the more enjoyment he derived from aiding them."

"In short," Neil said, "Aaron was a practical man, his brother an impractical one. Forgive me, I mean to cast no reflection on your father's way of life."

"I'm quite aware of what you mean," I said, "but I do believe that Papa was happier than Aaron. It is not an important point now, with both of them dead. Please tell me about my cousin Clara."

He held the reins loosely and seemed in no hurry to take me to Cliffside Castle. Not that I minded, for I wanted to see as much of the countryside as possible and also to get to know this young man whom I, so far, regarded as rather impetuous.

"There is very little to tell about Clara," he informed me, "other than to say she prefers to be by

herself. Mama and I aren't ogres, but Clara seems to regard us as such and insists on remaining alone. Mama is now considering moving out of the house, for she does not care to remain where she feels she is resented."

"I hope she will not go that far," I exclaimed. "Clara is too young to live all by herself in that great old house."

"Well, she'll have Mrs. Donahue, the housekeeper. And you. And the servants. I assume you intend to live there."

"Mr. Pitman," I said, "I seem to be quite without means, but I do not intend to live off the charity Clara will very likely offer me. I shall stay only long enough to straighten out Papa's affairs, become acquainted with Clara and your mother, and then I shall find work."

"But Clara has so much money she can easily maintain you in lavish style," Neil argued. "And the house has so many rooms, I haven't even seen them all yet. Besides, you're entitled to share in whatever your uncle left."

"We obviously do not see eye to eye on that score," I said. "But what of the Buddha? You do know about it?"

"Oh yes. I must say it's a work of art even if it isn't worth much."

"Has it been appraised by experts?"

"That's the first thing Mama had done when she suspected it wasn't genuine. Mama is a sculptress. Of course, you wouldn't have known that, but she's rather famous."

"Then, I cannot hope that someone was wrong. Papa set such store by that statue. He would no more understand what happened than I, for the mandarin who gave it to us was an honorable man."

"Apparently, somewhere along the way," Neil said, "it fell into not-so-honorable hands. I am sorry about it. Mama said if it had been genuine it would have been worth a great deal of money."

I sighed and made up my mind to examine the Buddha to assure myself that it was not genuine, and then dispose of it as an art object as quickly as possible. Perhaps it might bring me enough money to help me until I found some means of employment. I would anticipate no more than that.

I had seen Cliffside several times when I was four and five years old, but a child gets a toally different impression of a large estate and an imposing edifice than an adult. I remembered it as dark and gloomy because Mama said that was how she regarded it, but, in my child's mind, it had seemed like a heavenly place to play. Dark corners were but good places to hide and the many acres and rooms were only that much more space to play in.

So I was quite unprepared when the buggy made the last turn in the narrow dirt road and we faced the long sloping road up to the house. The estate seemed miles long from this point, much of it was still in dense forest, but the gradual slope was such that, from the drive, one could look up and see the open area before the house and, then, the house itself.

It stood there like some ugly monster. It was no

house but a castle with many turrets and gables, with minarets, balconies, outside walkways, verandas and a sea of chimneys extending into the sky.

Neil was watching my face when I first saw the estate. He smiled wryly.

"They do say the man who built this a hundred years ago did so to impress a girl he wished to marry. He believed he was granting her every dream, but it turned out to be a nightmare and the girl refused him. He gathered all his money, closed himself up in this house and died there alone. In my opinion, it ought to be burned down, but it has taken on quite a reputation and is now regarded, far and wide, as one of the showplaces of the entire East Coast."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "it has acquired dignity with age. I cannot say I regard it as a place of beauty, but I would not be so quick to condemn it as you, sir."

"You might be right," Neil admitted. "Mother likes it, but she's an artist and looks at it from a different viewpoint. At least, the roof doesn't leak, and there are three gardeners to take care of the grounds so that the responsiblity is not mine. I would dread it. You won't like Mrs. Donahue."

"The housekeeper? May I ask why?"

"She thinks the house and the estate are hers. She hates Mama and me; she'll not like your coming either. She would rather that Clara live alone. However, she is a very efficient housekeeper and sees to it the servants perform their duties properly."

The buggy was making the climb now and, consequently, slowing up considerably. What had seemed like a gentle slope from the distance, turned out

to be a rather steep incline. It was cool and dark along the road for the cedars lining it were thick and tall.

Then the climb ended and we entered upon the gentle approaches to the house; the drive wound among well-tended lawns and shrubs. From this point, the house looked far more impressive and, all at once, I remembered playing on the long front porch. How long ago it seemed!

Now, a woman stood at the head of the porch steps waiting to greet me. She was a strong-looking woman, taller than most, with hair that looked golden in the early afternoon sunlight. As I walked from the buggy to the porch steps, I saw that she was an exceptionally handsome woman. Not beautiful. Rather, she was patrician. Apparently, a woman of strong will as well as body. But then, as I remembered him, Uncle Aaron had been the same type. They must have been well-matched.

"Welcome back to Cliffside," Lillian Furnivall greeted me and embraced me warmly. Then she studied me for a few moments, quite critically, as if I were to be a subject for her sculpting. "You're most attractive,my dear Nancy. I shall give a formal ball for you as quickly as I can arrange it."

"Oh, but that isn't necessary," I said, quite alarmed at the prospect. "I am still mourning the deaths of my parents."

Mrs. Furnivall seemed not to have heard for she continued with her line of thought.

"Aaron had many friends and they frequently asked about you and your father. They will be delighted to see you as a young lady. Yes, a formal ball

is the best way to do it. Leave it all to me, Nancy. And I hope you will be happy here. I was sorry about the deaths of your father and mother. And I deplored the necessity for your having had to be told about the statue so soon after your arrival."

I had been prepared to dislike Lillian Furnivall, and, though I found her personality quite overwhelming, at the same time, she had a warmth and charm I found engaging. Neil passed by with a smile directed at me as he went into the house. He was laden with my baggage.

"It has been so long since I visited here," I said, "and yet I recall so much concerning it. I am, of course, intrigued with renewing my childhood friendship with my cousin. I do hope she is well."

"I hope so too," Mrs. Furnivall replied. "However, you will have to learn that directly from Clara because she rarely comes down. She speaks to me only when something about the house or the estate makes it necessary that she do so. She keeps her own counsel. I fear I must reveal to you that she does strongly resent my marriage to her father."

My eyes widened in surprise. "How strange! It seems most unfair of her. Surely, if her father was lonely and had mourned the proper period of time, he was entitled to the companionship of a good woman."

"Thank you, my dear. Your thinking is quite grown-up and it is pleasant to speak with you. You see, it was Aaron who fell in love with me. I was the one who hesitated; the enormity of this estate overwhelmed me and the money and power he possessed were far beyond anything I could ever

grow used to. But, I loved him, too, and I married him."

"Didn't Clara soften toward you, even after her father's death?" I asked, my tone incredulous.

"No," Mrs. Furnivall's smile was sad. "It was even my notion that he leave his entire estate to Clara. I urged him to do so in the hope that it might change her attitude toward me when she realized I was not a wealthy-husband-seeking widow. I am quite successful in my work and not in want, nor shall I ever be."

"Perhaps now that I am here and have met you, I can convince Clara of your sincerity."

"How I wish you could, my dear." Her hand rested lightly on my shoulder and she touched her cheek to mine in a gesture of friendship.

I was deeply affected by her gesture. So much so, I felt that we would become close friends and, since such was the case, I decided to ask her the question that was uppermost in my mind.

"Mrs. Furnivall, I would——"

"Oh, my dear, please call me 'Lillian.' I would like to hear my given name spoken around here."

"Thank you, Lillian. What I was about to say was that I would like to see the Buddha as soon as possible."

"Of course, Nancy. Now, come along; I'll introduce you to Mrs. Donahue. Then I will escort you to your rooms where you can bathe away the horrible soot and cinders from the steam locomotive. Also, I imagine you must be hungry. I shall have a tray sent to your room."

"Oh no, thank you, I'm much too excited to eat;

besides, I had a most substantial breakfast at the hotel this morning. Mr. Hayes was extremely kind to me. Thank you for sending him."

"He is a remarkable young man," she said—quite warmly, I thought. "I like him very much. And here is Mrs. Donahue. Our guest has arrived. This is Aaron's niece, Nancy."

Mrs. Donahue was short, pudgy, blessed with Irish blue eyes; her hair was raven even though she must have been at least fifty. Her face was plain as homespun and seriously set.

"So you're back from that heathen country?" she observed. "Like as not you're half-heathen yourself by now. Raising a child there! What was in the minds of your father and mother?"

"The welfare of many people," I said. "Quite a number they met are no longer heathens."

"They'll backslide," Mrs. Donahue prophesied. "Miss Clara asked me to tell you that she will see you later on."

"Thank you," I said.

I had tought it odd that my own cousin had not been waiting to welcome me. I was as alone in the world as she, and we could have been a great comfort to one another. But, since I learned of her dislike for Lillian, I realized she preferred to speak with me in private—which was her privilege. I was extremely curious to see her and talk with her for I found her behavior both strange and puzzling.

I followed Lillian upstairs, mounting the wide gracefully curving staircase that led to the second-floor landing. From what I had seen of the house thus far, little had been changed; a familiarity with it

came back to me. I thought I must have been unusually observant as a child because I did recall the large entrance hall with its two huge chandeliers and the bracks of candlesticks on the walls to light up the heavy mahogany furniture and the dark-red carpet.

I remembered the long balcony at the head of the stairs which extended above the entrance hall. From it, one could overlook the hall from behind intricately carved balustrades and a heavy bannister.

There were no large wings off the center of this house, for there were too many rooms, scattered too widely about to permit wings or any orderly arrangement of rooms.

Upstairs corridors were mostly short; each usually ended in a sharp turn which led into another hallway and, when the bedchambers off this were passed, there would be another sharp turn and more doors. It was indeed, quite possible to become confused and lost in this house.

The top floor had been reserved for house servants and the servants of friends of my aunt and uncle who had used to come here often. Clara's mother had been a splendid hostess who entertained on a grand scale. Her many dinners and balls were celebrated throughout New York State, where politicians and members of society vied with one another for invitations to Cliffside.

Still pictured in my memory was the great ballroom downstairs in which a hundred or more people could dance in comfort. Papa had looked with disfavor on dancing, but Mama, more open-minded, seemed to enjoy watching the dancers. I was quite unable to dance; however, I knew I would enjoy it—

whenever I heard music, I longed to move to the rhythm of it. I thought, quite recklessly, that I would now endeavor to learn the intricacies of the dance.

I was enchanted with the rooms into which Lillian led me. The sitting room was tastefully furnished with dark woods. The chairs were covered with mauve damask and reflected the sunlight. The window draperies were of the same material. The same lavender shade was used in the bedroom, and the lustrous silk with which the bed was canopied took my breath away.

I thanked Lillian for giving me such a beautiful suite, but she replied that the selection had been that of Mrs. Donahue who had undoubtedly conferred with Clara regarding it. I longed to ask Lillian about Uncle Aaron, but she seemed anxious to take her leave and I was eager to wash off the travel grime.

The thought did occur to me that Lillian and I were much alike in that we were here by the grace of Clara's charity. There was, however, one great difference. Lillian was already making a fine living, whereas I was, not only destitute, but without any talent to help me seek employment. I thought of kind Mr. Hayes and wondered if he would be able to advise me on what to do when he arrived.

"Supper is at six," Lillian said, breaking into my thoughts. "Not that it must be at that hour; however, Clara never comes down and I like to dine early so that I may spend part of the evening at my work."

"Six is excellent," I said. "Before then, I believe I shall take a walk. I wish to see the Hudson once again, and the cliff and the rocks. I imagine that little has been changed since I last walked here."

"It will be just the same, I am sure," Lillian agreed.

I changed to a shirtwaist, skirt and low-heeled shoes for comfortable walking. I made my way downstairs and left the house, encountering no one. Lillian had, of course, gone to her studio. I had no idea where it was located. There was no sign of Neil, nor did I mind, for I preferred to explore the grounds myself.

Mrs. Donahue was likely busy somewhere else in the house. Clara had still made no appearance. I did see a servant, a middle-aged woman who did not even look up from her work of polishing furniture in the enormous parlor.

A close inspection of the house could wait. I wanted to see the river again and walk on the soft grass on its banks. It seemed years since I'd set foot on the earth. All those weeks aboard ship had made me long for this experience.

The afternoon sun was already quite low, but, from the edge of the cliff, it would be full and bright across the Hudson. I found the path which led to the bank and stood looking toward the mountains in the distance; the broad band of the river flowed in the foreground. It was quiet and peaceful there. I only wished that Mama and Papa could be with me, for I felt suddenly very lonely. My life had changed too rapidly, too completely. I had given up wondering what I'd do until after I had talked to Cousin Clara. I was still eager to see her, to note the change in her from childhood to young womanhood. Despite what Lillian had told me, I was not prepared to form an

opinion on Clara's strange behavior without observation.

I was glad that I liked Lillian. If she had been a woman impossible for me to like, I should have remained only long enough to see Clara and I should have insisted our meeting take place at once. Neil Pitman, Lillian's son, had made little impression on me. I believed him to be a type quite willing to live off Clara, or anyone else, the rest of his life, so long as none of the largess required work from him. He was a wastrel, in my opinion, but it was no affair of mine.

I looked down at the jagged walls of the cliff and the river far below. How often I used to be warned never to go near the edge of the cliff. Now there was no one to warn me. I was grown-up—and I was alone.

I left the cliff's edge and wandered north, following a path I did not remember. It led me through another cleared area which was not so open as the lawn in front of the house. Before me were formal gardens, arbors, shrubs trimmed, sometimes, into fantastic shapes. It was like being suddenly transported into another world, one somewhat more frightening than the serene vista at the cliff's edge.

Then, quite unexplainably, I had a feeling that I was being watched—that eyes studied every move I made; that someone was close by. Whoever it was certainly could have no friendly motive in mind or he or she would have come into the open to meet me. Instead, whoever I feared remained hidden—but I was sure someone was there. Little things told me. A flitting, unaccounted-for shadow; the creak of a

young, sap-filled branch bent too far; the snap of an old, dried piece of wood. Perhaps ordinary hearing might not have detected these sounds, but mine was perfected to a fine point so that I had been able to hear the approaching Chinese troops long before they had arrived within range of our mission. Papa used to say I had better hearing than a hunting dog.

It frightened me to be secretly observed this way. I began walking faster, even though I had no idea where the path would lead me. The afternoon was declining and a strange feeling of terror began to take possession of me. This was not the kind of fear I'd experienced waiting before the enemy soldiers found me, but one even more excruciating. In China, I knew what the danger was, where it lay; but here, I had no idea. It could even be in my imagination, though I doubted it.

Once I came to an abrupt stop and I thought I heard a footfall in the brush to my left, as if whoever had made it had been keeping pace with me but I had stopped so suddenly that he'd been unable to do so in time to avoid taking the last step which I had heard.

"Who is it?" I called out. "What do you want?"

No one answered. Not that I had expected that anyone would. I had an urge to take to my heels and run away as fast as I could, but this I refused to do. Instead, I resumed walking and, all of a sudden, I found myself staring at a solid brick wall that extended perhaps three feet above my head. I could in no manner recollect such a wall. It had seemed to me when a child that Uncle Aaron's property had run clear to the edge of the earth and not ended at any brick wall.

I had no way of looking over the top of it, so I con-

tented myself with walking beside it. The land here was cleared and green lawns ran straight up to the base of the wall.

The sounds of someone following seemed to have gone now. I was grateful for that and some of my terror started to leave me. I decided I'd have to walk faster if I wanted to get back in time for dinner. It must be close to six o'clock, but I wasn't sure because I had left my watch, which I usually pinned to my blouse, in my room.

Now I entered a section where the forest seemed to take over—that meant the last fringe of trees before the front lawn. The high wall, abetted by the closely growing trees, created an artificial darkness, so that the evening seemed to be well along at this particular spot. That was why I never did have a good look at the assailant who tried to kill me.

I heard a grinding sound, as if hard heels were crushing small stones, and I turned about quickly, for it came from behind me. I was in time to see a large round rock hurtling straight at me. Simultaneously, I barely had a glimpse of a figure leaping down from the top of the wall to the other side of it.

The rock, for it was far more than a stone, missed me by inches. Had I not turned, it could very well have brained me, as I was sure had been intended. The stone thudded against the ground about a yard in front of where I was standing.

I looked about instinctively although I knew whoever had thrown that rock was already safe behind the high wall and there was no way for me to find out who it had been.

All I knew at that moment was that someone

wanted to kill me for the rock had been thrown with lethal intent. I had no doubt about that. I was trembling quite violently from my experience and I knew that was no place for me to linger so I began running in the direction of the house. Because I could neither account for a motive for the attack nor hazard a guess as to the identity of the would-be murderer, it was all the more horrifying. I burst from the forest onto the open lawn before the great house and the sight of this haven lent wings to my feet.

FOUR

DINNER WAS for three in the small dining room. There was another dining hall, a large one, used for formal affairs. Mrs. Donahue supervised the meal and two maids served it silently, not daring to say a word under the lash of Mrs. Donahue's stern looks.

The cook was very skilled and the food delightful. An aspic salad was followed by cold cuts of beef, turkey, and pork, along with a tasty cold vegetable salad. For a warm day, it was ideal, and I did justice to the meal. Dessert was, for contrast, hot apple pie; then, hot coffee.

I said nothing about my frightening escape of the afternoon. I wasn't sure what to say about it for the whole thing sounded like a figment of an overactive imagination.

Neil had little to say and I wondered if it could possibly have been he who had thrown the rock at me; perhaps he was now so morbidly disappointed, he didn't wish even to speak to me.

Lillian chatted pleasantly about unimportant events. We did agree that I would view the Buddha

right after supper. Neil excused himself promptly and went to his room. Lillian and I lingered over our coffee.

"Did you enjoy your walk?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. But I came upon something I do not remember. What does that high brick wall signify?"

"Hatred," Lillian replied promptly. "Aaron's hatred of the people who live next to us. Avarice, for they covet Cliffside and all its property. They are Arthur Seaton and his sister Virginia. They moved here, so Aaron told me after we were married, some ten or eleven years ago and promptly took to hunting on Aaron's land, letting their guests overrun it, and making a nuisance of themselves until Aaron had them brought into Town Court. There, Mr. Seaton was ordered to respect the 'No Trespass' signs Aaron put up. The trouble died away, but flared up from time to time, so Aaron caused that wall to be erected—too solid to be broken down, too high to be easily climbed over. Since then, the Seatons have minded their own business."

"It is an ugly wall," I commented.

"Yes. If the estate had passed into my hands, I would have had a firm understanding with the Seatons and then had the wall torn down. Clara apparently intends to let it remain. Shall we go now—to see my studio and the Buddha?"

"It would please me," I said. I did want to see the statue, for, when I had last observed it, I had understood it was worth more than a hundred thousand dollars—perhaps double or even triple that amount. I had looked closely at the ruby eyes and their sparkle had seemed genuine. Imitation stones could not re-

flect the light from so many facets, nor have the rubescent color they had displayed.

The statue itself was of gold color, and I was told it was either solid gold or that it had a pure gold surface many inches thick. I would never believe that the mandarin had paid my father's fee with a worthless object. He would have lost face had he done so when the deceit was discovered.

I walked with Lillian to the rear of the house. Her studio occupied a round room, the first floor of a four-story turret. Here, there was good afternoon light for her work, and a northwest window which enabled her to work well in the morning as well.

The studio was plain, with nothing but hard plain chairs to rest upon. In the center of the room stood a platform about two feet high on which a block of granite or marble could rest; it would support any substance Lillian was working on. At present, the block was granite and the figure taking shape would be the bust of an ancient Greek goddess with serpents twining in her hair. The face, what I saw of it, was twisted into an expression of violent terror and repugnance.

Then I saw the Buddha; it occupied a small platform and was covered with a muslin sheet. Lillian removed the sheet and lit extra oil lamps so that I could have a good view of the idol.

The golden Buddha was about two feet high, squat and ugly. It looked exactly as it had when I had seen it in China. I picked up a lamp and held it close to the fat wide face. The red jewels, set in each eye socket, reflected the light only dully. The real rubies had reflected the flame of a peanut oil lamp in my

father's hand with an intensity that far rivaled the flame itself.

Lillian picked up some sort of a small gouge or chisel and dug quite deliberately into the side of the idol's head. The gold had no more thickness than tissue paper and, beneath it, a silvery bright metal shone back.

"This is probably a good imitation of the original," Lillian said, "but, by no means, a perfect one because, when I first saw it, I immediately suggested it was not the one your father had sent. I cannot believe he would have been tricked with an imitation such as this."

"But it was real," I said. "I saw it several times. The mandarin could not possibly have kept it and sent this on."

"Someone did," Lillian said. "It was a very long journey and a great many people handled the statue. A clever thief would not need much time to have this imitation fashioned, and, in China, I imagine it would be a simple matter to make a substitution."

"But it was in a crate and labeled as machinery sent to the United States for repairs. It was purposely sent in this manner to deceive thieves."

"This time, the ruse did not work," Lillian said simply. "It is possible that I may be able to dispose of this for you. I shall patch the scratches I have made and touch it up here and there. As a frank imitation, it might bring five hundred to a thousand dollars from someone interested in Oriental art. Would you like me to see what I can do?"

"Yes," I said. "It only takes up space here and it is obviously worthless." I felt like bursting into tears.

The Buddha had meant so much to Papa and me. Our plans were a dream bound to come true, but it had just crashed into a million pieces.

Now that it was over and I knew there was no mistake, I tried to cast it from my mind. Dwelling upon the Buddha was as worthless as the imitation itself. Lillian, in an effort to take my mind off my disappointment, took me by the arm and led me about the studio to observe the various objects on which she was working.

It began to dawn on me that she was a most unusual sculptress—undeniably talented; however, her work seemed to be at least partly concerned with the sculpting of angels and benevolent saints which, I felt sure, belonged in a cemetery.

Lillian smiled at my sudden consternation.

"Yes, it is true. I sculp ornaments to be used as tombstones. Sometimes, I regard it as macabre to study a painting or tintype of some child, now dead, so that I may create the face of the cherub into that of a child. Or the face of an angel into that of some young wife or husband. Some of my most expensive pieces have had the faces of wealthy, deceased persons who ordered the work before their deaths, and wanted to be posed in the attitudes of saints. For those monuments, I get my highest fees, for I regard that practice as egotism at its supreme—it should be well paid for."

I shook my head wonderingly at the ideas some people have. It helped me forget the loss I'd suffered when the original idol was stolen and this imitation one substituted. I took one last look at the fake golden Buddha before I left the studio.

"Do you believe, if I went to Clara's rooms, she would receive me?" I asked Lillian.

"I have gone there many times and she has not even seen fit to ask who it is. No, I'm afraid she would refuse to see you. Then, one day, she will make up her mind to come down. There is no telling what she will do nor when. She is the greatest disappointment in my life, Nancy. She has everything in the world and, instead of being happy, she is miserably unhappy."

"She was a very quiet child," I said. "And I do believe Uncle Aaron worried about her from time to time. So did her mother, for my own mama used to receive their letters and, young as I was in those days, I recall hearing Papa and Mama talking about Clara's aloofness and how they hoped it would disappear when she achieved maturity."

"Apparently, it has not. Perhaps you can make her understand that neither Neil nor I wish anything from her. I married Aaron because he loved me and I was more than fond of him. I can't say I was deeply in love because he was far my senior, not a very well man, and I am not so old I was unable to find male attention. But we found a great deal of pleasure in each other's company and, when he asked me to marry him, I agreed because I wanted to be with him. We had little more than a year of a fine marriage, even if Clara will never admit it."

"Thank you for showing me your studio and the Buddha," I said. "I shall do what I can with Clara and, as you suggest, I shall wait for her to approach me. I, too, wish nothing from her except, perhaps,

a few days' hospitality while I settle myself and arrange my thoughts."

"I am sure she would not object to your staying here indefinitely, dear Nancy. I'd be delighted to have you. And now, I think it is time that you retired for this has been a trying day for you. Tomorrow, we shall talk more. Breakfast is when you arise."

I went straight to my rooms; their cheeriness filled me with delight as I entered. I was particularly entranced with the bathroom which had both a tub and a hip bath.

A maid must have unpacked, for everything was not only hung up, but neatly ironed. The bed was turned down and my nightdress lay across it. I was fatigued. I prepared myself for bed quickly, taking only the time to brush my hair the allotted hundred strokes. Then I went to one of the windows and raised it to let in fresh air. I looked out onto the estate, dimly illuminated by a quarter moon. It seemed alive with eerie shadows.

There was an intense silence as well—one I would need to grow accustomed to. For months, all I had heard was the wind in the sails, the spray against the prow, and the constant creaking of the sailing vessel as it plowed across the Pacific and then the Atlantic. Following that, there'd been the one night in New York where the noise seemed to continue all through the night hours. And now—this weird, vast silence.

I blew out all the lights except the bedside lamp. I thought about Mama and Papa and Uncle Aaron for a little while, and I knew how much I missed all

of them. Then I resolutely blew out the remaining lamp and settled down to sleep. Tomorrow, I would begin making plans. I would have to. I was as poor as Cousin Clara was rich, and I had my living to make..

Sleep came easily, for Lillian had been right. Not even the memory of being watched and then nearly stoned to death was enough to keep me awake.

I must have slept for some time because I came awake slowly. I don't know what did awaken me at first. My consciousness was returning gradually and I opened my eyes to stare into nothing but darkness. There wasn't a sound that I could detect.

But I had a strange feeling that someone was in the room. As my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, I could see the outline of a figure standing at the foot of the bed watching me silently. I raised my head. The image, all in white, seemed eerie and remained motionless. There was no way to identify my visitor for it was much too dark, but the white clothing gave her a ghostly appearance that shocked me into coming wide awake in a flash.

"Who are you?" I asked, attempting, not too successfully, to keep my voice calm.

"Do not fear me. I'm Clara. Your Cousin Clara."

Relief flowed through me. "I am pleased at last to greet you, but sorely puzzled you saw fit to wait until now. May I light a lamp?"

"You may," she said. "I wanted to see you alone, secretly. There is much to talk about. Evil things."

I struck a match and applied it to the lampwick, replaced the chimney, and turned up the wick to

give more illumination. The yellow light enabled me to see Clara clearly, especially after she moved beside the bed to sit on the edge of it.

Of course, Clara had changed. I remembered her as a chubby little girl too serious for her years, yet capable of playing games and being a congenial playmate. Now, she was frail to the point of looking as if she were quite ill. Her eyes were still large and dove gray; her hair had remained light brown, much like mine. She was only nineteen, but had the appearance of being twenty years older. There were lines of worry across her forehead and dark circles beneath her eyes. She was my cousin, the only blood relation I had left in the world. Impulsively, I put my arms around her and lightly kissed her cheek.

"Oh, Clara, I'm so pleased to see you again," I said. "Yet I wish to express my sympathy for the death of your father."

"And you have mine. Your loss was double that which I endured," she said.

"You do not look well to me. Are you ill, Clara?"

"In body—no. In mind, dreadfully so. I live in fear and terror. They wish to kill me. I believe they may have killed Papa."

I felt deep concern for the young girl who spoke these words, for they were those of one truly troubled in mind. Yet there was no vacant stare or look of wildness in Clara's soft gray eyes. Without asking her, I felt certain that I knew to whom she referred, though I could think of no two people less likely intent on doing her harm than Lillian and her shiftless son Neil. At least, that was the impression I had received from listening to him talk. However, I did not wish

to express such a thought for I was well pleased that Clara had seen fit to visit me and I wished to do nothing to antagonize her.

"Do you refer to Lillian and Neil?"

"Of course, I do. They are after the money, and the land, and the house. Everything. They wish it for themselves and I must be constantly alert lest they take it from me."

"But Clara, it is all yours by law; it is legally held by you. They cannot take it from you."

"They may try. There are ways——"

"But no—there cannot be——"

"They can kill me and then they think they'll get it all."

I was so startled that I was unable to reply for a few moments.

"Do you really believe that?" I asked when I found my voice again.

"Don't you? You have seen them."

"Clara, I spoke to Neil only during our drive here, and he had little to say. Lillian is not a soft woman, that I grant, but I cannot consider her as one who would commit murder."

"Then you must be on her side," Clara declared. She arose hastily, but I seized her by the wrist and pulled her down again.

"Clara, you're being very silly. You and I are blood cousins. We have no one else. We must trust one another. Therefore, I shall confide in you when I would not confide in either Lillian or Neil. This afternoon somebody threw a huge heavy stone at me from the top of that brick fence running along the estate. Your terror now is no less than mine was then."

"Could you not see who did it?"

"No—the rock was thrown as I turned. There were too many shadows, too much gloom at that point. I saw only a glimpse of a shadowy form jumping from the wall to the other side just before the rock struck the ground at my feet."

"They cannot know," Clara said. "It is impossible that they could have found out."

"Who are you talking about?"

"Lillian and that son. No—no, I would stake my life on it. They cannot know."

"Know what?"

"I will not tell you now. Even you must not know the secret, but, for you, it is not an evil one. I must keep this to myself no matter what happens, but if I die, Cousin Nancy—dear Cousin Nancy—you must find a man in the village named Kenton. Timothy Kenton. Everyone calls him 'Tim.' Go to him—tell him who you are. Do this quickly—if anything happens to me. Or you may share my terrible fate."

"Dear Clara," I said, "I fear you have misjudged your stepmother. Please do not think I'm against you for I most certainly will be on your side in any matter. She has informed me that her greatest wish is to know you better and to become your friend."

"Do you believe that?" Clara asked, her eyes great round fires of worry. "You have just arrived——"

"Yet I feel I can judge her at least reasonably well. She intends to give a formal ball in my honor. If she were wicked or trying to get rid of you—and me, for we are like sisters in this—then she would certainly not give such a ball."

"It is only to mask the way she really feels. She wishes everyone to think she loves us both, but she hates us. That I know."

"Will you attend the ball?" I asked.

"Never. Nothing could make me."

"But Clara, if you did, you would take much of the glory away from her. This is your home and you are the mistress, not Lillian. If she gives a formal ball, it has to be with your leave and blessing. Therefore, why not get all you can out of it and increase your standing in the social world?"

"Do you really think I should?" Clara asked. It obviously was something she'd never thought of before.

"I honestly do. In fact, I shall insist on it, dear Cousin. Unless you consent to appear, I shall ask Lillian not to give it."

"But I am a poor dancer and I do not mix——"

"Clara, in all my life I have not danced, for Papa was against it. So far as mixing with people is concerned, you have seen far more people than I, for the only friends I had were Chinese who were not much given to social functions."

Clara suddenly threw her arms around my neck. "I shall do it. You are right. I shall be the hostess and Lillian will fade into the background. It will be a wonderful evening. I must plan my gown and call on you to help me——"

"We shall plan our gowns together," I said. "Tomorrow, it would be wise if you asked to see me. Then it will seem as if we have not seen one another tonight."

"Yes—yes, that is how I wish it to be." For the first time, she smiled. "Nancy, I'm so happy that you came."

"Well," I said, "I wish I had come under less tragic circumstances. And, added to the heartbreaking loss of my parents, I have learned that the Buddha which Papa had sent here which was to be my inheritance is but an imitation. Such news came as quite a shock."

"You mean that ugly old idol? Was it truly gold and jewels?"

"Truly, Clara. I would have been wealthy if it had not been stolen."

"I have more than enough for both of us," Clara said. "I have little use for wealth. I wish only to keep this house and land, to maintain it as Papa would have wished. Beyond that, I have no ambitions. So please consider whatever I have as yours. I will see to it that arrangements are made which will give you a suitable income."

I shook my head. "You are as generous and kind as your father was, but I can make my own way, and I would rather. Yet I do appreciate your offer and I will indulge myself and remain here for the time being."

"Stay as long as you like. Return whenever you wish. Cliffside is yours, Cousin Nancy. Oh, I do remember how much fun we had when we were children and how I cried when you went away with your papa and mama. I was inconsolable for days, but Papa said you would be back before long. It seems like a lifetime."

"It won't happen again," I said. I felt that I had grown up rapidly during the past twenty-four hours.

The result of adversity is not always bad, for, from it, I had come to know how much I was on my own and how I must resolutely face whatever trials came my way.

"I shall look forward to your visit tomorrow," Clara said. "We must never let them know what we are thinking and planning for they will strive to circumvent us."

"Very well, it shall be as you wish," I said. "But we must also keep our minds open."

"Good night, Nancy." She kissed me on the cheek and laughed lightly with happiness. Then she fled from the room and I heard the door close softly behind her. I got back into bed and lay against the pillows wondering if Clara could be right about Lillian and Neil.

It seemed impossible to me, but, at least, I had been warned. I did wonder who Tim Kenton might be, and it did occur to me that Clara, endeavoring so hard not to be taken in by Lillian, Neil, or anyone else, might have fallen into the hands of some person who would take advantage of her. Any glib fortune hunter would have found Clara easy prey, for she was starved for affection, and far too filled with suspicion for a girl of nineteen. Perhaps, I thought, I could earn some of my keep by making her happy. That would be a worthwhile effort whether I profited by it or not.

I felt far easier in my mind than at any time since I arrived. With good fortune I might make this a pleasant household after all. Uncle Aaron **would** have wanted that, and so would Mama and Papa.

FIVE

APPARENTLY, Clara was so excited by our secret meeting that she was unable to wait because while Lillian and I were still at breakfast, Clara came down —much to the astonishment of the servants and of her stepmother.

"She looks so ill," Lillian whispered as Clara crossed over to the table. "The poor child. If I could only make her understand——"

"Good morning," I said brightly. "It has been fourteen years since we met, Cousin Clara, but I believe I would have known you anywhere."

I got up and went to her. We embraced, and Clara gave me a knowing smile at the thought that we were deceiving Lillian.

"I, too," she told me. "You have only grown taller and rounder, but you look as you did long ago. I am glad to welcome you to Cliffside once more."

"Thank you," I said. "Mrs. Furnivall has already made me most welcome."

Clara's face clouded. "We shall not refer to Lillian

as Mrs. Furnivall in my presence. To me, there was but one Mrs. Furnivall and she is dead."

"Clara," Lillian said, "I have no wish to usurp the memory of your mother. I know full well I could never attain her standing, nor do I wish to, but my name is Lillian Furnivall now, and there is naught I can do about it."

"Just so it is not used when we are alone, or in a family group," Clara said. "Beyond that, I shall understand. But I do have a warm memory of my mother and I wish to keep it intact."

"Very well," Lillian said. "Now let us forget all else save the fact that Nancy has come back from China and she must have a great deal to tell us. And there will be much for her to discover from us as well. I suggest we let the conversation drift where it may."

I thought Clara looked surprised at Lillian's helpful attitude and she even smiled slightly as she added cream to her coffee. There were a few awkward moments, but I began talking about China and soon we were all chattering at a great rate. We drank so much coffee and remained at the table so long that Cook had to brew another pot. Clara's cheeks were pink with excitement and she spoke freely with her stepmother as if she bore no resentment toward her whatsoever. However, I kept my surprise hidden; I wondered if I had imagined her visit of last night.

After we had sipped the last of our coffee, Lillian suggested that Clara take me around the estate. Clara gleefully approved and ran upstairs to change into clothing suitable for a walk. While she was thus occupied, I went with Lillian to her studio.

"I do believe you have done wonders for the child by merely coming here," Lillian said. "I have not had one-tenth as much conversation with her since I came to Cliffside. She seems, actually, a changed girl, and all to the good, for I even feared for her life the way she had secluded herself."

"She is so pale, she does look ill," I said. "Possibly it is due only to the lack of sunshine and fresh air. I shall try my best to see that she gets out each day."

Lillian had tied a large brown apron around her waist and picked up some of the tools she used in her work. She was about to finish a beautiful head of a cherub. Even though I realized the cherub was carved in the likeness of the child over whose grave it would stand guard, I still had to admire the work.

"I am not a great artist," Lillian admitted, "but I'm a craftsman nonetheless, and I could increase my orders to almost any number I wish. Yet the work often depresses me so I cannot go on."

"I do admire your need for independence, Lillian," I said. "I have always felt that way myself. I shall endeavor to change Clara's attitude toward you, though this morning her manner was quite friendly. In the past, since her father died, she has had no one to confide in, but now she has me. If I can convince her you wish her only good——"

"I do, Nancy. With all my heart, I do. She is a sweet, lovely girl. She would be even lovelier if she found happiness, and wished to see people and go journeying. She is so wealthy—yet so poor in many things."

To our total surprise, Clara came down dressed in

riding coat, skirt and boots, with a jaunty derby hat on her carelessly brushed hair.

"Why, Clara," I said, "you look wonderful. Are you going to ride?"

"I have several riding horses," she said. "I know that Neil exercises them regularly. You ride, do you not, Lillian?"

"Well, I would scarcely say I was accomplished," Lillian said, "but I manage to stay on."

"We shall all go riding someday. I wore these clothes because I wanted to. Come, Cousin Nancy. It will be nice to wander about the estate again. We shall return for luncheon at one."

"I'll see to it," Lillian promised. "Have a good time. Neil is out there somewhere, riding again. He appreciates your letting him use your horses."

"It does seem to me," Clara said, "that no one ever asked me if he could, but then why should he not use them? I'm glad he does. Tell him he may ride as often as he wishes."

"Thank you," Lillian said.

The implication in Clara's outburst was not lost on her, but she showed neither anger nor resentment.

I took Clara's arm and led her out of the studio before she spoke with an air of pique again. We dashed out the front door and across the lawn as we used to do when we were scarcely more than toddlers. Clara cried out in glee and, stretching her arms, she pivoted several times, her face alight with joy.

"This is all mine. All of it, Cousin Nancy. I own every blade of grass and ounce of earth."

"Truly," I said, "you are fortunate. Now you must learn how to enjoy it, Clara. If you will allow me, perhaps I can show you how, though I shall probably be a poor teacher for I have never been accustomed to such luxury. Our pleasures were simple ones. But to have all of this!" I shook my head in wonderment.

"We'll learn together," she said. "It will be wonderful from now on. Everything is going to change. I have a definite feeling about it."

We wandered along the drive to the main road, descending it to the forest line. We might have gone further, but the sound of an approaching carriage startled both of us. A few moments later, we saw Raymond Hayes driving alone in a rented carriage toward the mansion.

I was so happy to see him, I almost ran toward him, waving my arms and calling out in a most undignified manner, but I refrained, giving myself a mental scolding for having had such a reckless thought. I was glad I controlled myself, for Clara surprised me with her next statement.

"I'm in love with Raymond Hayes," she said wistfully. "I have been for a long time, but he won't even look my way. He's in love with Lillian, or he thinks he is. She set her cap for him long ago, and she knows how to attract and hold a man."

"Why, Clara," I remonstrated, "I cannot believe that. Mr. Hayes is much younger——"

"Do you think that makes any difference to Lillian? Except to make her want him even more."

I was stunned by this odd revelation, but I took

care not to show it. When Mr. Hayes saw us and brought the horse up, my greeting was friendly.

He jumped down from the carriage, his smile cordial. After greeting us both, he addressed Clara.

"It is good to see you out again, Miss Furnivall. The arrival of your cousin must have been like a tonic to you."

"Truly, it was," Clara said.

"And you," he said to me, "have lost your shyness and uncertainty. Good—I admire modesty, but not when it is carried to an extreme."

"Will your time permit you to remain for dinner?" Clara asked.

"I fear not and it is, for me, a grave disappointment to have to lose out on the company of two beautiful young ladies." He bowed formally this time, though his smile was mischievous and Clara and I giggled in unison.

"We'll ride back with you," she said. "Come, Nancy."

After Clara's confidence, I wouldn't think of intruding.

"I prefer to walk," I said. "I'm in need of exercise after all those weeks aboard ship. You two go along. I shall join you at the house."

Mr. Hayes helped Clara onto the seat, tipped his hat to me, and then leaped aboard and the carriage moved away. I saw Clara edge slightly closer to him and I was amazed at her boldness. Her behavior of the moment seemed in such contrast to that of our meeting last night in my room. So much so, I wondered if I had imagined her secret visit. Gone was the

furtive, frightened, little-girl manner; it had been replaced by one of utter daring.

I was rather amazed at my own serenity, for I had expected to be beside myself with joy at Mr. Hayes's arrival, but I was able to accept his presence quite calmly. True, I was glad to see him for he had been very kind to me. Perhaps he had seemed so godlike before because he was the first to welcome me when I came ashore, and the first American young man I had seen in many a year with the exception of the ship's officers.

I started walking down the drive, away from the house, because the coolness and the perfume of the conifers were welcome to me. But I had progressed no more than a few steps before I again had the feeling that I was being watched.

This time there were no sounds, nothing to warn me, but the feeling was there. I moved on as if I suspected nothing, but, very suddenly, I stopped. There was a slight crackle of dry wood to my left. Now I did grow alarmed. I turned and began retracing my steps. The tunnel-like approach through the trees along this road frightened me. I would far rather have been in the open, and I felt an inclination to run for an open space as fast as I could.

But I knew that would serve only to warn whoever watched me that I was aware of his presence and to demonstrate for him the terror he induced in me. So I walked as casually as my taut nerves permitted. Then I was inspired. What if I could become the stalker? What if I should conceal myself and make this individual search for me and, in so doing, reveal

himself? It would be an advantage to be able to identify this person who was so interested in my movements.

I was quite astounded to discover that I possessed so much courage, but I decided to place my plan into operation. I knew the watcher was somewhere to my left and he was not hidden too deeply in the brush. If I vanished, he would be compelled to step into the road to look for me, and, once in the open, I'd have a look at him—the sole purpose of my scheme.

I gradually eased over to the right of the drive, turned abruptly and moved as quietly as possible through the trees on the other side of the road. I was now as hidden as the mysterious watcher. I could stand there silently and wait for him to look for me.

I chose the protection of a thick evergreen; I peered from behind its trunk every few seconds. There was complete silence for a time, followed by the faint sounds of slow, careful movement across the road. I remained exactly where I was. My heart was pounding and I was terrified, but I was determined to see this through. My entire welfare might be at stake. I had to know who was interested in what I did.

Fully ten minutes went by before he came out. I first saw him as a deeper shadow in the gloom of the thick forest; then he crossed through a ray of sunlight which struck down between the trees and I had a good look at him.

The outstanding feature of this man was his hair. It was a definite dark red. He was tall and slender,

with a muscular body. His face was lean and lined with worry. He had lost me, and he couldn't figure out how, or where I had gone.

Uncertain, he now stepped directly into the road and was clearly revealed to me. He didn't look as if he had any evil intentions. In fact, I rather liked his appearance. There was an air of ruggedness about him, but of gentleness, too. Yet, he had watched me and stalked me as he would an animal. Certainly, if he meant me no harm, he would have simply called to me and introduced himself and then stated his business. It was more than possible he was the person who already had tried to kill me.

He gave a definite shrug of his shoulders, put both hands into his trousers pockets, and walked back down the road, whistling softly but merrily, as if he didn't have a care in the world. This was certainly not the attitude of a murderer. His lightheartedness made me smile, even though I had been so terribly frightened a few moments before.

I returned to the house, sorely puzzled by this development. There were, most certainly, strange things going on at Cliffside. At this moment, Mr. Hayes was with Clara, who professed to be enamored of him, and I suppose Lillian had joïned them.

Though an older woman, the artist was still extremely attractive and, according to Clara, she had set her cap for the attorney. I smiled wryly as I thought of how the very charming Mr. Hayes had had quite an effect on me. If I were to be completely honest with myself, I might say I had briefly thought myself to be falling in love with the man, even though he was still practically a stranger.

I had been grateful to learn from Clara that there were two other women who, quite possibly, had prior claim on him. In fact, I was delighted to learn of it, for I believe it brought me to my senses. It was far wiser for me to think of Mr. Hayes only as a friend. I certainly had need of his valuable advice and I intended to seek it. I was keenly aware that it would be far easier to do so if I were free from any romantic thoughts.

Mrs. Donahue informed me that Clara was with Mrs. Furnivall and Mr. Hayes and that she was to take me to them. The good woman guided me to a dismally sedate room at the rear of the great house which Uncle Aaron had used as his office. When I was a child, I'd been afraid to go into it for fear of demons or frightening monsters of some type, which, I thought, lurked in the shadows. As I entered the room now, the familiar feeling of terror seized me.

Nothing had changed. The desk was still the huge plain worktable of the finest maple, three inches thick, polished and aged until it was almost black. The chairs were of the same wood—massive and not very comfortable. Bookcases built to the ceiling were filled with leatherbound volumes, most of which had never been read. There was a dark-gray rug underfoot; oil portraits of Uncle Aaron and my father hung on the walls.

Seeing my father's likeness looking down at me, with that benign, benevolent expression which had been so much a part of him, the past bounded back and I could feel the tears start in my eyes, but I quickly recovered myself.

Mr. Hayes sat behind the desk with Clara seated

on one side and Lillian directly in front of him. He arose as I entered and bowed, then resumed his seat after I took a chair between the two women.

"We are almost finished," the lawyer explained. "With an estate such as this, there are always many legal papers for consideration and signature. Many things to discuss. I was just about to say I'm delighted to find Miss Clara looking so well. Undoubtedly, your presence has cheered her, Miss Furnivall."

"She is the one who has cheered me," I said, "with her kindnesses and her invitation that I remain a guest as long as I wish."

"Why, Cousin Nancy," Clara said, "you have as much right here as I. Or anyone else."

She cast a sidelong glance at Lillian and the implication was clear. It was an awkward moment and there was an embarrassed silence as Mr. Hayes gathered up his papers and placed them in a heavy paper portfolio.

Then, rising, he said, "Miss Furnivall, would you be kind enough to take a stroll with me about the premises?"

"Why, I—I—of course, Mr. Hayes, if Cousin Clara will excuse me."

"It is my wish to speak with you about your plans for the future. I have one or two ideas. Of course, if you prefer to speak of this in the presence of the others——"

"There is certainly no reason why I should not," I said. "It is, after all, a family gathering."

"Go with Raymond," Clara said, her smile almost malicious as she regarded Lillian. "If the gen-

tleman wishes to speak to you alone, take advantage of the offer, dear Nancy. Neither I nor Lillian will be in the least jealous. Will we, Lillian?"

Lillian gave a short laugh. It was almost ugly. "Run along. Have your secrets. If you miss your train, Mr. Hayes, there is a spare bedroom waiting."

"More like thirty of them," I commented. "Even though I visited here as a child, I am quite overwhelmed by the size of this abode."

Mr. Hayes left the house and strolled up the path toward the formal gardens and the cliff's edge. He was quiet, subdued; he seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Miss Furnivall," he said finally, "my firm recently installed two of those new mechanical writing machines and we have difficulty in finding girls skilled in their use. We, therefore, plan to send a girl to a school to learn how to become a typewriter. The work would probably pay quite well and I, for one, should be delighted to have you working for us."

"Mr. Hayes, I am deeply touched by our generous offer, and I do wish to express my thanks. However, after my arrival, Lillian told me of Clara's resentment toward her. I was given ample evidence of it a few moments ago. In view of that, I feel that it behooves me to remain at Cliffside in the hope that I may ease Clara's bitterness toward her stepmother."

"My dear Miss Furnivall, I do believe you intend to do a little missionary work here."

I glanced at him to see if he were mocking me, but I was quickly reassured, for his eyes were warm and understanding.

I colored slightly as I said, "I'm not certain how

successful I will be, but I am hopeful that, since Clara and I are about the same age, she might listen to my counsel."

"I believe you've made a wise decision and I am in complete agreement with what you say. However, since you have decided thus, I feel I should inform you that Clara is possessed of a violent temper. Also, on occasion, she has threatened to take her own life."

"How horrible!" I exclaimed.

"Frankly," Mr. Hayes said, "I doubt that she would. I rather believe it's a case of extreme emotionalism. However, there is very definite antagonism between Clara and her stepmother and, if you can bring about a harmonious relationship between them, it will be to your everlasting credit."

"Thank you, sir," I replied. "I believe that Lillian has done all possible in her own efforts to win Clara over to her side."

"Perhaps she hasn't gone about it in the right way," the attractive attorney observed. "Lillian has a very strong personality and while, at times, Clara seems meek and subdued, she can, when she wills, become equally strong. So, I fear, the two of them have been at loggerheads since they first met."

"Did Clara resent her father marrying Lillian? I mean, did she regard Lillian as an intruder?"

"I couldn't answer that honestly," Mr. Hayes told me. "I have not been in their company enough. You see, Clara's appearing downstairs at all is unusual. You probably are to be thanked for that."

"I'm glad. Perhaps I can do some good at that."

"I have a feeling that if anyone can, you can."

We had reached the fence at the edge of the cliff

and, in the early afternoon, the river below was bathed in light; the greenness of the trees on the far shore of the Hudson was brighter than ever. It was a stunning picture, quite enough to take one's breath away and we feasted our eyes on it.

"It is beautiful," I said. "I'm afraid I shall become quite spoiled living in such a heavenly atmosphere."

"It is quite rugged in the winter," Mr. Hayes told me. "But then, having lived in China, I doubt you would allow excesses of climate to inconvenience you."

"To me, nature in all its elements is beautiful."

"And so are you, Nancy," he said, looking down at me, his smile friendly. "If I may make so bold as to address you by your Christian name?"

"I am pleased that you desire to do so, for it makes me feel I am among friends."

"Be assured, you are," he told me. "I am grateful you have come, for I feel it is going to be good for Clara. Do try to get her out every day. The quicker she resumes a normal life, the quicker she will accept Lillian, or, at least, tolerate her, which she scarcely does now."

"She thinks a great deal of you, Mr. Hayes——"

"Please—let it be 'Raymond' since we are friends," he broke in.

"Very well. Did you ever attempt to reason with Clara in regard to Lillian?"

He was silent a moment, then said brusquely, "I'm afraid I only served to antagonize her."

"I understand," I replied.

"How could you?" he asked, coloring.

"I fear, Raymond, your manner gives you away.

You know that Clara harbors a deep affection for you."

His smile was one of relief. "I'm glad you know. She only thinks she does. She has led such a sheltered life. My duties here have been such as to look after her as well as the estate. Therefore, she has nurtured a few romantic notions about me."

"I fear her feelings go deeper than that," I said seriously. "And if I may be so bold as to speak frankly——"

"Pray do."

"She believes Lillian also to be in love with you. I am of the opinion that this idea increases her resentment toward her stepmother."

Raymond threw back his head and laughed. "Lillian is a very beautiful woman and a very sophisticated one. A man would be a fool not to find her fascinating. If I were a charlatan, I might find it difficult to choose between the two—Lillian, for her charm and gaiety; Clara for her millions." He paused a moment and then resumed, his tone deeply serious. "Truly, I am concerned about Clara. She is not the most steady-minded person and I am quite aware of her unfounded infatuation for me. It makes it difficult to cope with, for I wish to do naught to upset her. That is why I am so pleased you are here. You are calm, sensible, and even-tempered. You can do much to keep her in good spirits."

"Be assured, Raymond, I shall do my best."

"I am certain of it. And now, much to my regret, I fear I must return to my carriage. As it is, I will have to make haste to catch my train."

We walked briskly back to the house where the

carriage stood awaiting him. Clara and Lillian came out to bid him farewell. When Raymond was halfway down the drive, he turned and waved to us, then the carriage vanished down the sloping tree-lined road.

"Did you have a rewarding talk?" Lillian asked, and I wondered if I detected a trace of jealousy in her glance.

"Quite," I replied. "Raymond's firm offered to place me in a school where I would learn to become a typewriter and, thus, become eligible for employment with his firm."

"Oh, Nancy," Clara cried. "You mustn't leave! I won't allow it!"

I smiled at her imperious tone. "I shan't—thanks to your graciousness. It would pain me deeply to be forced to leave such beauty."

"Thank goodness," she said, her smile one of relief. How quickly her mood changed, I thought. "I'll teach you how to ride and Neil can escort us."

"I'd like that. I'd also like to meet the Seatons sometime. Tell me, is Mr. Seaton an elderly man?"

"Oh, no," Clara said. "Though he's not as young as we are. More like Lillian's age."

"He's about thirty or thirty-two," Lillian said sweetly.

"What does he look like?" I asked.

"Quite an impressive sort," Lillian said. "Stocky, tall, but quite strong. He sports a small mustache and considers himself an extremely polished country squire."

"What color is his hair?" I asked.

"Black. Very black." Then Clara asked, "Have you seen him?"

"No, but if I do, I wish to be able to recognize him."

So the redheaded man had not been Arthur Seaton. Who then could he possibly be, and what was he doing on Cliffside estate?

SIX

THERE WAS some time yet before our evening meal so I was not surprised when Clara suggested that she show me the stables. However, I felt she was more interested in the conversation I had held with Raymond than in my looking at horses, for I detected a glimpse of hostility in her eyes. She guided me around the east side of the house and we entered a grove of trees. I assumed they concealed the stables and the work sheds.

"What did Raymond and you talk about?" Clara asked bluntly, confirming my suspicion.

If I was startled, I took pains not to show it.

"I already told you. He knew my concern was great when I learned I was practically destitute. I think it was very kind of him, in behalf of his firm, to present me with the opportunity of learning to typewrite."

"Did he mention me?"

I hated deception, yet I could not reveal all Raymond had told me concerning Clara. Therefore, I decided to be truthful, yet tactful.

"He did mention that he was pleased at my arrival for he felt you and I would get along splendidly.

I assured him we were already fast friends and that we were pleased to renew the relationship."

"Did he mention Lillian?"

I saw no reason to be evasive in that respect. "He told me that Lillian and you didn't get along."

"I hate her."

"Oh, Clara, hatred is such an unrewarding emotion; it serves only to make one ill. If allowed to go too far, it can even destroy a person."

"It won't destroy me," Clara said defiantly. "I shall always hate Lillian."

"She wants to become friends with you. Why don't you give her the opportunity?"

"She only wants the money that is mine."

"She has her profession," I reasoned. "I'm sure her income from that is adequate for her needs and those of her son."

"That is not wealth," Clara stated stubbornly.

"Please, Clara, I beg of you, do not fall in love with your worldly possessions. It will change you from a sweet young girl to a scheming, suspicious, grasping person."

Clara laughed. "You talk like a missionary."

I winced inwardly at her callousness, recalling that Raymond had had a similar thought.

"It will do you no good to preach, Cousin Nancy," she went on. "I shall do what I wish and think as I wish. However, I will endeavor not to make things so difficult you will want to leave Cliffside, for, I must confess, I do feel better since your arrival and, who knows, you may even convert me into a God-fearing Christian."

"Please, Clara, do not joke about such a matter,"

I said quietly. "I know my upbringing was quite different from, and more unusual than that of most children. I may have strange ideas about certain things, but I do not like to see you hurting yourself."

"Fear not. I shan't."

We had cleared the grove, and the stables and work sheds which were painted a bright red came into view.

"Did Raymond talk of his feelings for me?"

I was startled at the bluntness of her question.

"Surely, he would not do so," I replied, feeling myself treading on thin ice. "He is in the employ of the law firm which handles your estate and, as such, it would be extremely indelicate of him to mention any matter of the heart. Also, you must bear in mind that he is probably a man of modest means and, undoubtedly, very proud."

For the first time, a smile played about Clara's lips. "Did he speak of Lillian other than in reference to me?"

"No," I replied. And, with honesty, added, "I doubt she interests him."

She laughed aloud. "How wonderful! Now I do feel better and, perhaps, I shall even be kind to her. I feared he might have fallen for her charms. She is guileful, that woman."

"Raymond is quite intelligent and could see through coquetry."

"I notice you are calling him by his first name."

"He asked permission to call me by mine as well since he would be coming here rather frequently. I saw no harm in it, for I consider him a friend."

"Then you haven't fallen for his good looks and gracious manner?"

"I have not," I assured her.

Completely heartened, Clara banished all thought of Raymond from her mind and turned her attention to the stables.

Neil and the head hostler came out to greet us and his surprise at Clara's presence was something to behold. Neil introduced him to me and I learned his name was Bill.

"Clara," Neil said warmly, "it is indeed a great pleasure to see you and your cousin enjoying the afternoon sun. I was about to exercise one of your stallions. Perhaps you young ladies would like to ride with me?"

"I don't ride," I said. "In China, the best I could do was to ride a mule, and I'm sorry to say I even fell off that poor beast."

"I'd like to ride," Clara said pleasantly. "I'd like it very much. Is Royal Princess still here?"

"She is indeed, miss," the hostler said hastily. "I could saddle her in a few minutes——"

"And saddle Saracen," Neil ordered. "I'm sure Miss Nancy can stay on that ancient plug."

"Well," the hostler hesitated a moment, "he's ancient all right, but still a mite skittish——"

"Oh, saddle him," Neil said airily. "We'll ride beside her. Old Saracen couldn't run a hundred yards before he'd be winded."

The hostler hurried off. He first led out the stallion Neil had helped groom. It was a magnificent animal, but not much given to the attentions of two females;

one of them was deathly afraid of him and he seemed to know it.

Royal Princess was a sleek chestnut mare. A three-year-old, Clara explained. Her horse and mine carried side saddles. The somewhat sorry-looking ancient I was to ride stood patiently while I climbed the wooden mounting block and, with the aid of the hostler and Neil, managed to seat myself in the saddle.

Neil instructed me in the handling of the reins and, presently, my horse moved away from the stables and went slowly across the fields. I had, of course, ridden when I was a child. Over these same fields, too, and I soon found that I was no longer afraid and that I enjoyed the exercise. The ride was a slow one, for the old horse plodded along and I complimented Neil on his choice for me.

Suddenly, Clara urged her horse into a gallop and Neil went after her. She was racing him and I was joyous at seeing Clara in such high spirits. I had no great liking for Neil Pitman, for I felt he was completely lacking in ambition, yet I had to admit he was congenial. To be pleasant to him was, indeed, not difficult.

I was nearing the brick wall symbolizing hatred and no longer holding the reins tightly. I was almost wishful that the horse would move a little faster. If I had spoken my wish, the animal could not have responded any sooner, but I would scarcely have wished for the speed the old stallion found in his limbs when he saw the snake.

I never did learn what kind of snake it was, but it

was a large coiled reptile. My horse reared up and almost threw me off, but I clung desperately to the saddle and managed to survive the bump when we came down. Then the stallion stretched his legs and began to run. For a few moments, I thought the animal had gone mad and believed he could jump the brick wall, which no horse could have done, but he veered away barely in time, without slackening his speed.

I shouted for Neil and Clara, but I doubted that they were close enough to hear me. I couldn't very well slide out of the saddle for I'd have probably been severely hurt if I tried. All I could do was hang on and hope the horse would soon tire, though he certainly gave no indication of it as yet.

He was running faster than the sleek animals Clara and Neil rode and, try as I might, I couldn't pull him up. He paid no attention to the bit or the reins and I knew that eventually the animal would very likely stumble and fall. I'd be thrown hard and I had no idea how to prepare myself for such a fall.

I cried out again, vainly I knew—then another rider came pounding driectly toward me. Until now, the brush had hidden him and, for the first time, I noticed that my horse was heading straight for the forest growth, and I would undoubtedly be swept out of my saddle and severely injured.

I had no time to identify the rider, except to notice that he wore brown riding breeches and highly polished boots; his shirt was open at the neck. He was an expertly skilled horseman.

He veered his mount and raced along beside me. I could see the look of worry on his face. He reached for my stallion's head, missed, tried again. This

time he secured a grip. His own horse slowed its fast pace and gradually brought the stallion to a stop where it stood panting, still wild-eyed, its mane tossing.

The man leaped to the ground and ran to help me down. I was so shaken that I all but fell into his arms, for once I touched the ground, it seemed to sway under my feet. I could smell tobacco and brandy on him, but it was in no way offensive.

"All right now, miss," he said, "You're fine. No worse for it, and neither is your horse."

"I don't really know how to ride," I said.

"Did that fool, Neil Pitman, let you go riding alone?" he demanded.

He was a very strong man, with black hair and a carefully trimmed small mustache. This was Arthur Seaton, of course. I freed myself of his support and moved weakly away from him.

"I do thank you," I said. "I was quite frightened——"

"What caused that old nag to bolt?" he asked.

"A snake."

He nodded. "Ah, yes. One of the hazards of riding over some of these fields in summer. This is old Saracen, isn't it?" He approached the horse and ran his hand down along its neck, quieting him. "Of course, it is. Saracen never was a very good riding horse for just that reason. He's deathly afraid of snakes and will bolt every time he sees one. Neil knows this—the idiot! He should have remained with you."

"I'm sure he believed I was perfectly safe. I am Nancy Furnivall——"

He nodded. "The girl from China. My sympathies

at the untimely deaths of your parents. They must have been fine people, if a bit strange, to have gone off to such a land where the people they help repay by killing their benefactors."

"They were trying to bring knowledge and the word of God to those people," I explained.

"Well, I suppose there was some justification for their sacrifice. I am Arthur Seaton, your neighbor."

"Thank you again, Mr. Seaton," I said. "But may I ask how it happens you are on the Furnivall estate when that brick wall is supposed to keep you out? Not that I decry the fact that you are here. You certainly saved me from serious injury."

"Walls can be taken down," Mr. Seaton said. "I never regarded this one as capable of keeping me from riding where I wish. Not far from where we are now, there is a passage—yes, I arranged it."

"Then, in return for your kindness," I said, "I shall keep your secret."

He shrugged. "Tell them. If they rebuild the passage, I shall open another. This feud is all very silly, anyway. Are you staying here, Miss Furnivall?"

"Temporarily. My cousin has invited me to visit her. We are enjoying the renewal of our acquaintance for I've not seen her since we were children."

"You'll probably be good for her. She stays in too much. Can't abide her stepmother and stepbrother. Possibly, with good reason. Money-seekers, if I ever saw any. I will say, however, that Lillian is a handsome woman. Talented as well. I have seen some of her work. Our best cemeteries display it," he added with open sarcasm.

"Nevertheless, she has a talent, Mr. Seaton, and

I feel that she deserves high praise for devoting herself to her work. I am under the impression that she is a dedicated person in her chosen profession."

"No doubt. Why don't you pay my sister and me a visit?"

"Thank you, I shall."

"Bring your cousin—if you think she'll come," he added, with a wry grin.

"I may be able to persuade her," I said. "Surely, she does not view you with the same antagonism that her father did."

"I suggest you inquire of her about that very thing. Be assured, though, she will be warmly received. I doubt that Lillian and her son would be interested in coming. As for Neil, he's a blasted idiot to have left your side when you are learning to ride. That is, I call him an idiot unless he schemed that you might break your neck."

"That's ridiculous," I said, feeling mild pique at this outspoken person. However, he had just rescued me, preventing a nasty spill, so I held my tongue.

"Is it? I don't know, but I have an idea your arrival hasn't made his plans, or his mother's, any simpler. Take my advice and walk your horse back. If he shies at a snake, let him go. There is no need to be alarmed yourself. The snakes hereabouts are absolutely harmless."

"Thank you, Mr. Seaton," I said.

I could hear Neil calling my name. Arthur Seaton mounted hastily and rode down along the wall. I couldn't see where he turned and entered the passageway, but he disappeared as if by magic.

Neil rode hard toward me, brought up his horse sharply, and jumped to the ground.

"Did he spill you?" he asked.

"No, I was able to bring him to a stop, as you see. I fear, Neil, that this horse is somewhat more spirited than you gave me to understand. I came very close to being injured."

"He never did a thing like this before," Neil swore, "He does shy at snakes, but nothing else alarms him."

"Isn't this the season for snakes? And is not a pasture a logical place for them?" I asked sharply.

"So he did bolt? I'm sorry. I should have thought of that."

Clara soon joined us. I told her what had happened and I saw a flash of the temper I'd been told about by Raymond Hayes.

"Your place was with Nancy, not trying to keep up with me," Clara said sharply. "You should have known that, Neil. I must say that I do not understand why you permitted this to happen when it was so easy to avoid. Take Saracen back. Nancy and I will walk."

Neil's face flamed with embarrassment. "I'm sorry, Nancy."

"Do not grieve over it, Neil," I said, feeling a like embarrassment about Clara's lashing tongue. "I was not injured."

His eyes thanked me as he gripped Saracen's reins and started away. But he was not quick enough, for Clara's tongue spilled further venom, adding to his mortification.

"I told you to get out of here. If my cousin had

been harmed, I'd have ordered you off the estate. You're a lazy, shiftless ne'er-do-well."

"Please, Clara," I begged. "Do not give vent to your temper. It will only make you ill and Neil is truly repentant."

"I hate him!" she spoke with vehemence. "I don't know why I tolerate his mother and him on this estate except that I believe my pity must exceed my hate."

"Lillian was married to your father," I reminded her. "She does have a legitimate right to live here and I feel she could be of great help to both of us."

"In what way?" Clara demanded.

My mind pinwheeled in an effort to think of some explanation.

"Why, the ball," I exclaimed. "I've never attended one nor have I ever owned an evening dress."

"You shall have the best one made by the finest dressmaker who will be brought up from New York," Clara exclaimed, her anger already forgotten.

"I do thank you, Cousin," I said gratefully. "I'm sure I shall feel like Cinderella."

Clara laughed. "I shall be your fairy godmother and Lillian shall be a wicked witch."

"Oh, Clara," I smiled in dismay. "Let her help us make it a wonderful ball."

She laughed and I knew she had relented. "I was really only teasing. I am so happy to have you here I shall be glad to let Lillian take charge of everything."

"She will appreciate that, but I think she would appreciate, even more, your expressing an interest in the details."

"I shall," Clara promised, "but only because you asked."

"Thank you," I said, pleased. "You will find that we'll need Lillian."

Clara nodded. "It pains me to admit you are right. Very well, there will be no friction unless Lillian selects a more beautiful gown than you or I."

"Clara, Lillian is much older than either of us. Whatever she wears will be appropriate for her age, as ours will be for us. You'll see."

Clara's eyes sparkled and I imagined it was because she was visualizing us looking quite elegant in our gowns. "I'm so grateful that you came back, Nancy. I did miss you through all these years, but I never knew just how much."

"You have no idea how grateful I am to be here," I said. "I shudder to think of what would have happened to me in that great city, were it not for your generous nature. It proves you are, at heart, a dear person."

"But I love having you with me," Clara protested.

"I am humbled by your words," I said, "but I do not feel I could remain here indefinitely. I must make my own way. However, for the present, I am thankful to you."

"We will speak no more of it," Clara said. "Just remember, it is my wish that you remain with me the rest of my life."

"Just now, I suggest we return to the house and study the latest issue of Godey's pattern book. We will undoubtedly find some patterns there to our liking for our ball gowns."

"An excellent idea," Clara agreed. "It's going to

be the most wonderful ball that has ever been given at Cliffside. We shall invite everyone and they will be entertained as if they were royalty. I shall spare no expense and will welcome everyone."

"Even Mr. Seaton and his sister?" I asked.

Her face clouded for a moment. "If Arthur Seaton comes, I shall shoot him on sight. If his sister comes, I shall turn the dogs loose on her. I will have nothing to do with them, Nancy. My father hated them and so do I."

I was most gratified that I had not told her Arthur Seaton had rescued me and that he had been in a position to do so only because of his habit of riding on her property. It was well Clara did not know that there was a gap in the brick fence which Arthur Seaton had made and which he used whenever he pleased —also that I undoubtedly owed my life to him.

No, I could not tell my cousin that—not at this moment. There was enough friction at Cliffside now. I wished to bring no more.

SEVEN

Back at the house, Clara and I retired to our rooms to change our apparel. First, however, she came into my suite with me and led me to the wardrobe. Opening its doors, she presented to my view several dresses which had been hers which she was giving to me.

"There will be more of everything, dear Cousin," she said. "But I know you came with a modest wardrobe; you cannot be garbed in mourning all the time. A colorful dress may not ease your heartache at the loss of your parents, but it will serve to lift your spirits, and I feel your parents would not disapprove."

"Oh, Clara, I am deeply beholden to you for your many generosities," I exclaimed.

"Nonsense," she said deprecatingly, already departing the suite, "we will speak no more of it."

I bathed and dressed quickly, choosing a dress of soft China silk. The sleeves were high on the shoulders and the bodice ended in a fringe. It was quite elegant and the very latest in fashion. I felt certain it had

never been worn and my heart warmed at Clara's magnanimous gesture.

However, as I went downstairs, I wondered if my parents would have approved. It was true, my period of mourning was about over, yet this life was so different from the one to which I'd been accustomed. I had been taught and trained to serve others, for only in that way would I find true happiness. I firmly believed it. I also believed that Clara was in need of help. She was obsessed with hatred for her stepmother and stepbrother. If I could wipe out that hatred, I would be performing an act of goodness.

However, I could not help Clara unless I remained here and that I was determined to do. The more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that my parents would approve. If it were not for Clara, I would now be attending the school in New York learning to become a typist. Not that I was averse to the prospect of office work, but I felt that, for the present, I was more useful at Cliffside.

I entered the drawing room where Lillian was seated before the fireplace reading a book. She looked up and her comely features flashed me a smile.

"Do join me," she said, patting the cushion of the settee. "Let us become better acquainted."

"First of all," I said, "I had better tell you that Clara became angered at Neil this afternoon."

"Oh, that girl," Lillian sighed. "What did my son do now to antagonize her?"

"Well, it was nothing really," I said smilingly. "Neil suggested that I ride along with Clara and him. He selected Saracen; the old stallion gave me no trou-

ble until we encountered a snake; then he bolted, and I had a terrific fright."

Concern etched her features. "Were you thrown?"

"No," I smiled reassuringly. "He finally stopped." I remained silent regarding my rescuer's part in the episode.

"Thank goodness," Lillian said with relief.

"Anyway, I thought it would be wise if you and I were to discuss the ball about which Clara has become enthusiastic. I know you said you would give it —but don't you think it would be more appropriate for her since Cliffside is, really, hers?"

"Of course," Lillian acquiesced with a smile. "I'm pleased she has gone so far as to take an interest in a social event. I'm also glad you changed your mind about it."

By the time Clara came down, Lillian and I were deep in plans for the party—all contingent on Clara's approval, as we told her—and we had several pattern books which we were poring over, endeavoring to make a choice of gowns. Relief flowed through me as Clara picked up a magazine and entered the spirited conversation with us.

Everything went serenely until the evening meal when Neil joined us. Then Clara withdrew into herself. Obviously, she still harbored anger and resentment toward him. I knew better than to attempt to make light of the almost disastrous event of the afternoon so conversation lagged, then stopped altogether. When we were halfway through our main course, Clara pushed back her chair, arose, and stalked from the room.

When she was no longer within hearing dis-

tance, Lillian said, "It is a pity Clara is so difficult. I'm sure Neil is penitent about what happened this afternoon."

"I am, Mama, and I apologized for the thoughtless risk."

"I have given it no further thought," I said. "And I shan't. Let us hope by tomorrow Clara will have forgotten about it."

Lillian shook her head. "She won't. She forgets nothing unpleasant."

"She not only won't forget it, she will keep harping on it," Neil said in tones of disgust.

"Then let us not keep harping on it," I pleaded, "for as far as I am concerned, it never happened."

"Thank you, Nancy," Lillian said. "You know, I am hopeful you may be successful in mellowing Clara. This afternoon, for instance, was the longest time she ever spent in my company. She was not only civil, she was actually friendly."

"Then it's well I didn't put in an appearance," Neil said wryly.

"It's gratifying to have her more gracious," his mother said, her smile tolerant.

I wanted to get the conversation away from Clara, for I felt an intense loyalty to her despite her dislike for these two people.

"This will be my first ball," I said. "Truly, I am excited about it. Yet I don't know how to dance even the simplest step."

"I will teach you," Neil said. "When shall the ball take place?"

"In exactly eighteen days," his mother said. "We will send out the invitations tomorrow."

"Be assured," Neil said, smiling, "by that time you shall dance as well as anyone there. I will even teach Clara if she will allow me."

"Let us hope she will," I said. "If not, I shall endeavor to pass on to her the lessons you teach me."

"Mama can play the piano for us," he said. "Dancing is but a matter of rhythmic sense; I can tell you have that by the way you walk."

"But not by the way I ride," I commented pleasantly.

He laughed. "At least, dancing is not as dangerous."

I retired directly after dinner for it had been an exciting day and I will confess my body felt the effects of the vigorous ride on Saracen.

I sat in darkness in the quiet of my room and thought of my beloved cousin. Despite her temper, I loved her. Her generosity toward me made it evident that there was much goodness in the girl. I felt it incumbent on me to bring it out.

I thought of Raymond Hayes and wished secretly that he returned Clara's love for him. Perhaps that was what she needed the most—love and understanding. She was a lonely girl and seemed grateful for my presence. Yet, I somehow sensed Raymond was far more interested in his career than in falling in love with either Clara or Lillian.

Then my thoughts veered to Mr. Seaton. He was a strange man. Outspoken, curt, possibly even domineering, but at the same time he had been so gallant with me this afternoon when he rescued me that I couldn't help but admire him.

Then there was the mysterious redhead. I should

have been most aggravated with him, but, somehow, I found myself quite intrigued by him. Here was a man who stalked me most assiduously, betrayed considerable concern when I vanished from his sight, and then went on his way, whistling merrily. What manner of man was this? How could he be dangerous or have evil intentions?

At least, I told myself, life here at Cliffside was anything but dull. It wasn't all pleasant, but it was stimulating. I arose, still in darkness, and disrobed. I stepped into my nightdress, brushed my hair the allotted number of strokes, and settled myself in bed.

But there was no sleep for me. Of course, I knew it was due to this sudden, extremely drastic change in the pattern of my life. Not many weeks ago, I lived in a backward Chinese village where the staple food was rice. Where an evening's amusement consisted of reading aloud from a magazine or a newspaper many months old. Where there was mud instead of sidewalks, and a bicycle was a symbol of great wealth and importance. Even the compound which housed the hospital and church was crude and primitive with thatched roofs and floors, sometimes of packed earth.

Now I was in America, in a house so large it frightened me. Where food came in courses and was served by trim maids under the supervision of a housekeeper. Where glittering chandeliers took the place of undependable oil lamps and there was a stable of horses and a carriagehouse full of vehicles of all sizes. Truly, I thought, this young country of ours had accomplished an advance several times greater than China had been able to do in thousands of years.

With my mind whirling about with such thoughts and no sleep possible, I got up and put on a dressing gown, slipped into my satin slippers, which had also been presented to me by Clara, and I opened wide the French doors leading onto the balcony which was, in reality, a rooftop.

It was an intensely dark night, without moonlight or a star in the sky. The house was in complete darkness at this hour so no light escaped from any of the windows to alleviate the gloom outside. I was barely able to detect the waist-high railing which ran around the balcony.

I was half tempted to waken Clara for her bedroom was down a bit and entrance could be made through French doors. I probably would have, except that I remembered she was in a rather nervous state and extended rest would do her good. It was warm and, despite the darkness, quite pleasant out there.

However, I must confess I felt quite alone and gradually a feeling of uneasiness pervaded my being. So much so, it served to recall the strange episode of the murderously large rock which had been thrown at my head by an attacker who vanished on the other side of the brick wall. The thought occurred to me that such a foe might try again. I looked about apprehensively and tried to shrug off my fears.

I told myself that this was my home now for as long as I wished. I was among friends, people I could count on. There was no reason to be afraid. I hummed a little Chinese melody and walked softly along the balcony. I didn't know I was at the far end of it until my hands touched the railing. I turned

back and decided I had best go inside before I stumbled or created some sort of noise and awakened others in the household.

I had reached a point about halfway to my room when I felt the balcony floor vibrate slightly. At no time did I hear a sound, but that sudden vibration made me think someone had, in some way, climbed onto the balcony and vaulted the railing.

I went cold with fear. My first inclination was to scream and run to my room, get inside, and close the French doors as quickly as possible. But I chided myself for wanting to give in to such a cowardly impulse. So I stopped and began to turn about to see if I could observe anyone in the darkness.

I never did quite make the turn, for the man—at least, I felt quite certain it was a man—wound an arm about my waist. At the same time, he tripped me so that I fell forward. His other arm slipped beneath my knees and I was lifted as he might carry a child. As he moved toward the railing, he began raising me higher.

My heart pounded with terror as I realized this man's intent. He was going to throw me over the rail. It flashed through my mind that below part of this balcony was a brick court. If I landed on that, I would undoubtedly be killed—and this man knew it. He was trying to murder me! All this happened in the space of a few seconds, yet, though I wanted to keep my eyes closed, I dared to look up into his face. It was completely concealed by a scarf and the disguise was further effected by a brimmed hat which was pulled down to his brows. It was impossible to see who this maniac was.

I opened my mouth and screamed. Instantly, he set me down so he could clap a hand over my mouth. The hand was gloved so that I could not determine whether it was a man's or a woman's, but it effectively cut off my cry of distress. I felt it must be a man for, though I was a mere five feet two inches tall and weighed scarcely ninety pounds, I felt myself too heavy for a member of my own sex to lift, though later I did think that Lillian might be quite capable of performing such a task. Even then it was a thought too horrible to contemplate.

However, that one loud wail was enough. Clara, from inside her room, began crying for help in a very high-pitched tone that seemed to grow louder and louder.

Suddenly I was released, then given a hard shove that sent me reeling down the balcony until I tripped and fell headlong. When I managed to get to my feet, Clara was still screaming, but I could see no signs of the intruder. There was yellow light in some of the windows and I heard excited voices.

I staggered over to the railing. There was no one below. Apparently, this person who had attacked me had been frightened by Clara's screams and rushed away before he could throw me over the rail. Then he'd probably climbed the rail, and lowered himself in the same way he came up. The darkness had enveloped him completely.

I ran to Clara's room, calling her name. She stepped out onto the balcony, holding a lighted candle, head high so that her face was illuminated. It was stark white with terror. I assumed my own was

no less pallid, and I hurried to her and put my arms around her.

"Thank you. Oh, thank you," I said with heartfelt gratitude. "Had you not awakened and frightened that murderer off, I should have been thrown over the railing."

"Who was it?" Clara asked. "Could you see who it was?"

"No. The attack came so swiftly, and the darkness was so intense. Added to that, the assailant's face was covered. I had no opportunity of seeing either face or form. I'm not even sure whether it was a man or a woman, but I was lifted up and was being carried over to the rail when you screamed."

"Come into my room," Clara begged. "We have awakened the entire household, no doubt, but I would like to talk to you about this alone——"

I heard someone's shoes scrape on the brick paving below and, though it was an effort, I moved over to the rail to peer down. There was someone below! Clara was at my side and she saw the figure as well.

"Stop!" I shouted. "You, down there——"

"It's me—Neil," came the response. "I heard someone and went looking——"

We couldn't make him out, but we did recognize his voice.

"Someone tried to throw me over the railing," I called back. "It was Clara's screams that forced him to release me. He rushed to the railing and descended in the manner he had come up."

"I'll see if I can find him," Neil called out.

"Be careful," I shouted.

"Have no fear. I'm carrying a gun. I know how to use it, and I will."

We heard Neil running off into the night. Clara and I moved into her room and she closed and locked the doors behind us. She lit more candles while I struck matches and attended to the lamps. Soon the room was bright with the comfort of light.

Clara sank into one of the chairs and covered her face as she began to cry. I quickly stepped to her side.

"Do calm yourself, Clara. I'm perfectly all right."

"You don't understand," she sobbed, jumping up and flinging herself onto the bed. "You just don't understand."

"Understand what?" I asked, placing an arm around the distraught girl.

"The same person who attacked you tried to kill me a week ago," Clara sobbed. "I saw him—or her—and the face was covered with a scarf—in time to reach my room, close the doors, and fasten them. Nancy—you were mistaken for me. My screams may have saved your life, but I also believe that, when I screamed, the murderer knew he had the wrong girl. I am the one he wants to kill."

"In heaven's name, why?"

"I do not know." Clara sat up, reached for a handkerchief on the table alongside her bed, and dried her tears.

"Did you tell Lillian? Or Raymond?"

"I told them both, but I fear they think I imagined it."

"I don't believe you imagined it any more than I did."

"Thank you, Cousin."

"What makes you think they don't believe you?"

"I guess because after Papa died, I threatened several times to take my own life," she said shamefacedly. "It was a horrible thing to threaten, but I was so lost and lonely; I had no zest for living."

"Please don't be angry when I ask you this," I said softly, forgetting my terror in the hope of easing hers, "but did you ever try to be friends with Lillian?"

"No," Clara admitted. "I hated her because she took Papa from me. We were such good friends. He treated me like a grownup from the time Mama died because he said that, one day, this estate would be mine and I would have to learn how to run it. I know a lot about this property, Nancy."

"I'm sure you do," I replied kindly. "and I think it would do you much good to use that knowledge."

"But Raymond insists I not concern myself about it," she said and, for the first time, her lips moved in a smile.

"But have you tried to reason with him—tell him it would be good for you—it would keep you busy?"

Clara's head moved slowly from side to side. "I wish to do whatever Raymond tells me to, for I feel he knows what is right for me."

I nodded. "Of course. But we must inform him of this attack on me because it was no product of my imagination."

"We will tell him the next time he comes," she said.

"In the meantime," I replied,"I feel we should inform the constable in the village."

"Oh, Nancy!" Clara seemed appalled at the thought. "I would rather not."

"But for your protection—and mine," I exclaimed, perplexed at her reluctance to ask for protection.

"There is no proof," she exclaimed, once again in a high state of nervous excitement. "They might say we were both—insane. We are, after all, cousins."

"Who would make such a statement?" I exclaimed in shocked tones.

"Lillian might," she said. "Remember, until you came, I kept to my room. I know it was odd of me and even unkind. But I cannot like Lillian—or her son for he is an outright wastrel."

I smiled. "He is going to teach me how to dance," I told her.

"I wouldn't let him touch me," Clara said with a shudder.

"You needn't," I told her, "for I will pass on my dancing knowledge to you."

"Nancy, have you thought that it could have been Neil who tried to toss you over the railing?" Clara asked, her eyes widening at the implication.

"It is possible," I said. "Though I hadn't thought of it. Yes—he could have climbed down from the balcony and pretended he had just come out. However, we certainly cannot accuse him of such a dastardly deed without some degree of proof."

"I know," Clara agreed. "But I'm frightened. I have been frightened for a week. It was just a week ago that I escaped the intruder. Since then, I've had a feeling that someone wishes to kill me. Who or why, I cannot say, but after what happened tonight, I hope you will believe me."

"I do, my dear cousin. I agree that something sinister haunts this house and this estate. I will confess that now I am afraid. Perhaps we should go away from here."

"Oh, I could not," she exclaimed. "I could not bear to leave; I wish to be here whenever Raymond comes."

"If you went away," I teased, "you might meet someone you care for far more than Raymond."

"Never!" my cousin exclaimed. "I love him dearly. I feel that, one day, he will return that love. I believe he would risk his life for me."

"Dear Clara, are you sure you do not set too much store by Raymond? He is a charming, gracious gentleman, but he seems to be totally absorbed in his career."

"That is so he will be worthy of all this wealth when he marries me. He is very proud, you know."

"I know," I said soothingly. "Why don't you slip beneath the covers and I will remain with you for the remainder of the night?"

"Very well, Cousin," she said, acquiescing. "Please lock the French doors though."

"I shall," I said, moving over to them.

"You know," Clara went on, "I think it is Lillian who wishes me dead—Lillian and her son. They believe that, with my death, they will inherit Cliffside and my father's fortune. Why else would anyone wish to kill me? Murder is done either out of hatred or for profit, and Lillian has both reasons. I fear it is she."

"Do not dwell on it," I pleaded. "We have no

proof and she does seem to want your approval of her very much."

"She will never have it," Clara said firmly. "I am kind to her because I realize otherwise I would make it difficult for you. But I will never like her or her ne'er-do-well son."

Just then a knock came at the door. Lillian called out.

Clara sat bolt upright, clutching the covers to her. "Do not let Lillian in," she whispered in terror. "I cannot bear the sight of her."

"I'll step outside to talk with her, then I'll return and spend the night with you."

"Thank you, Nancy. I am truly fortunate that you have seen fit to remain at Cliffside. Will you continue to do so, now that your life has been threatened?"

I did not tell her of the attempt on my life with the rock. She was distraught enough. "I will remain with you as long as you wish me to."

Clara smiled and I nodded encouragement as I went to the door.

Outside, I spoke in whispers to Lillian who, herself, seemed in a high state of nerves.

"I cannot imagine such a thing happening," she said when I had finished relating the incident to her.

"But it did, and I assure you I would have hurtled to my death, had not Clara's screams frightened off the intruder."

Lillian's hand clasped her brow. "How horrible! And how ashamed I am not to have believed Clara when she said there was an intruder on the balcony a week ago."

"She did not imagine it any more than I did," I said firmly.

Lillian's hand left her brow and rested lightly on my shoulder. "You're being very brave about it."

"I don't feel brave," I replied. "But I had to hold onto myself because Clara is in a terrible state of nerves. Nor do I blame her."

"I suppose she has accused Neil of performing this dastardly act," Lillian said, her tone resentful.

"It would have been highly possible for him to have done so," I reminded her, "but there is no proof. It might even have been a woman."

"Surely you don't suspect me."

"I don't suspect anyone in the house," I replied. "I am merely stating possibilities. I prefer to think it was an intruder."

"May I go in and reassure Clara that I had nothing to do with such a horrible deed?"

"I think it would be most unwise. I have quieted her and your presence might upset her."

"You're right," Lillian acknowledged. "Are you remaining the night with her?"

"I am."

"Thank you, dear. Clara needs your comforting presence. I do hope you won't leave us now," she said and her eyes, in the light of the candle she held, pleaded with me.

"Fear not, I shan't, for I agree—Clara needs me now more than ever."

"Bless you, dear Nancy," Lillian murmured, "for coming to Cliffside."

I had had nowhere else to go—though I did not remind her of that. However, I do believe that had it

not been for Clara, I would have left the sinister house come morning's light. This experience was more terrifying than the difficulties I had undergone myself in China, for there I knew who my enemy was. Here I hadn't even a suspicion.

I did wish that Clara would have allowed me to go to the village to inform the constable. It seemed to me that some sort of guard should be posted to be on the lookout for the intruder; I had a feeling that he would strike again and, perhaps the next time, our luck would not protect us. And how right subsequent dire events proved my trepidation was justified!

I gathered a comforter from the foot of Clara's bed and brought it over to a chaise longue which was set before a window commanding an extensive view of the grounds. Not that it would do me much good for the night was too dark, but, at least, my ears might be attuned to any alien sounds and I would come awake quickly. I snuffed out the candlelight and put out all the lamps except one. Then I went over to Clara's door, locked it and returned to settle down for sleep. But sleep eluded me again; I felt I should remain alert and wary lest the intruder come again. However, he did not so I attempted to ferret out who he might be.

I tried again to think of something about my encounter with the would-be murderer which might give away his identity. I refused to believe it could be a woman. Now that I had time to think about it, this seemed impossible, for I doubted Lillian was capable of picking me up and carrying me about. Two people in this household that I knew of could have attacked me. Mrs. Donahue, who looked, and was, a

powerful woman. Or Neil, for, while he was not a husky man, he was athletic. But Mrs. Donahue had no reason that I could think of for doing such a thing.

With Lillian, it was different. She would legally come into a vast fortune were Clara to die. Or, if Clara should become mentally confused, then Lillian would be in a position to take over. The more I thought about it, the more I could understand Clara's reluctance to confer with the constable regarding my near encounter with death. Yes, Lillian had much to gain; I could not ignore that fact. Clara might be duly justified regarding her suspicions of Lillian who was a clever woman—one who might easily fool an unwary girl such as I. And I determined that, as of this moment, I would, without Clara's knowledge, become quite as suspicious as she.

Then there was the mysterious redhead. He had given me the impression of power and strength. But how could I accuse a man whose identity I did not know? A man whose reasons for spying were completely unknown to me? Had Clara been awake, I would have questioned her about him, then and there, describing him in the hope she might recognize him from my verbal portrait.

It was at moments like these, when there was stress and perhaps danger, that my mind went back to those terror-filled hours in China when I had submerged myself in the filthy river water and the two treacherous soldiers discovered me and were coming after me. I turned my face hard against the pillow to keep from crying out and bursting into sobs. For, not only did my thoughts return to that terrible episode

of my life, but they went back to the memory of Mama and Papa and how they had met death bravely and calmly—but only after giving me my chance to live. Now, my life was threatened again.

Once again, my own troubles came to the forefront and I thought about the Buddha. It seemed incredible to me that this idol which had looked so genuine in China, had been transformed into an almost worthless chunk of metal and glass by the time it reached Uncle Aaron.

Truly, Cliffside was a strange house, a frightening one, but I could not leave it now, for, if Clara told the truth, she was also in danger and it was not in me to abandon my own kind at a time of need.

EIGHT

I SLEPT late the following morning; when I awakened, Clara had already left the room. I arose, went to my own suite, bathed and dressed hastily wondering if, with the new day, she had calmed or was still emotionally disturbed.

Downstairs, Lillian greeted me and accompanied me into the breakfast room. She sipped coffee while I ate heartily of rashers of bacon, eggs, and hot rolls. She told me that Clara had risen early, breakfasted and had gone riding on the estate. Lillian had further assured me that Clara's attitude, while not cheerful, was cordial. I felt relief at such news.

"She may even have gone into the village," Lillian added. "When her father was alive, she took frequent rides there."

"Was she depressed?" I asked with concern.

"She didn't seem so, though she was subdued. However, when I mentioned that the seamstresses would be here on the morrow with materials from Stewart's, which is the leading department store in New York City, she brightened."

"I do believe she is actually looking forward to the

ball," I said. "Perhaps that will take her mind off what happened to me last night and to her a week ago. However, though I know she wants nothing done about it, I do think the constable should be informed in case there is an intruder on the estate."

"I agree," Lillian admitted, "though I suggest you obey Clara's wishes in the matter. She is, after all, mistress of Cliffside."

"Such is true. But the thought of a maniac running free about the grounds fills me with dismay."

"It would have to be an intruder, but maybe Neil frightened him off. He undoubtedly heard Neil tell you he had a gun, for I heard my son say that."

"I do hope you are right. In any case, I shall go along on that assumption; otherwise, I shall be coming down with a case of nerves. I don't think my sanity could stand many more misadventures."

"You never did speak of the tragedy which befell your parents in China. However, it was in the papers."

"Then there is still no need for me to speak of it," I said, "for the dreams I have are unnerving enough. In my conscious moments, I choose to put it from my mind."

"You are wise to do so," Lillian said comfortingly. "It saddens me that it was such a terrifying experience which brought you here. However, I must say, once again, that I am thankful of your presence. You have already been a great help to Clara in the few days you have been here. I believe that, with time, she will change completely."

"I hope so," I replied, not at all convinced, for I

was mindful of Clara's words of the night before. I knew that Lillian lived in trustful longing that Clara would accept both her and Neil. I doubted that my cousin ever would although I would continue to work toward that end.

"Clara has already selected the design for the gown she wishes to have made for her," Lillian told me. "Now, you must select one, Nancy. I am going to New York City this afternoon to make a choice of suitable fabrics for the patterns. I was wondering if you would care to accompany me."

"Is Clara going?"

"No, though I asked her."

"Then, I think it would be wise for me to remain here."

"I fear I must agree," Lillian admitted, "though I would cherish your companionship."

"Some other time," I said.

"Then you will excuse me," she asked, "so that I may dress?"

"Of course, Lillian," I said. "I'll have my pattern selected by the time you come downstairs."

"Splendid," she replied. "You'll find the fashion books in the library."

I finished my coffee and went immediately to the library where Lillian had laid the books out on a long table which was placed before a bay window.

I chose a design which was called in the pattern book a "Princess Dress"; it fit the figure closely and formed a slight train at the back. It would have a Medici collar and sleeves which would be puffed to the elbows, then closely fitted down to the wrists. It

was quite elegant and the thought of wearing it sent my spirits soaring; I knew how flattering it would be.

When Lillian returned downstairs, I showed her the dress I had chosen and she complimented me on my chic taste. She told me that Clara had chosen a Tudor gown and that she herself was going to wear a Liberty Empire gown. I felt a great sense of relief to know that the style of each of our dresses would be different for it meant Clara would feel no resentment toward Lillian.

It was early afternoon before Clara returned. Her face was flushed from her ride but she seemed quite calm.

"Forgive me for not being here when you arose," she apologized, "but I felt a ride to the village would do me good."

"I'm glad you went," I told my cousin.

"You must learn to ride well," Clara said. "Besides being of great help in getting around, it is fun. I will teach you."

"I would love to learn!" I exclaimed. "But I don't have riding clothes and I fear that the dresses you presented to me are not quite appropriate for riding."

"Think not of that," she replied. "You shall have a riding costume made exactly for your very own figure. In the meantime, since we are of identical size, I have an extra one which will fit you almost perfectly."

"How exciting! When will you start to teach me?"

"Tomorrow morning," Clara said, smiling at the prospect.

"I will really feel elegant," I said, laughing a little with delight.

"You should," Clara said, eying me carefully. "You're very lovely, you know. You're beautiful inside as well as outside and it shows."

"Thank you, Cousin," I said, coloring at her gracious compliment.

"I'm going upstairs now to change," Clara said. "Also, I believe I shall lie down and rest a bit for I still feel the effect of my fright about you of last night."

"An excellent idea; rest is the best tonic for nerves."

I still had an awareness of the danger which had beset me last night myself, but I was determined not to let it get the better of me.

"I believe while you're resting, I'll explore the gardens," I said.

"They're beautiful at this time of year and we'll have sufficient blooms from our own gardens to decorate the house for the ball," Clara said. "I will say that Lillian should be excellent at the *décor.*"

"She will. Now, you run along upstairs and get your rest."

I stood at the foot of the stairway and watched Clara until she disappeared from my view. I was just about to go outside when Neil came along.

"Good morning, Nancy," Neil said. "I trust your horrifying experience of last night will not cause you to leave Cliffside."

"It won't," I said determinedly. "While I should not want a repetition of it, I have weathered it quite well."

"You're a very brave girl," he said, his smile one of admiration. "I was about to seek you out to see if you would care for a dancing lesson."

"I would indeed," I assured him. "However, your mother is going to New York City and there is no one to play the piano."

"Oh, yes, there is," he contradicted. "Mrs. Donahue, while not skilled at the art, is quite adequate for our needs."

"In that case, I am most eager to begin," I said enthusiastically, "for I do want to be fairly adept by the evening of the ball."

"Then, allow me."

Neil extended his arm and I placed my hand lightly on it. He led me along the reception hall to the end where large double doors faced us. He opened them, bowed in courtly fashion, and motioned with one hand for me to enter. I did so, giggling slightly at his exaggerated gallantry.

"You look around for yourself while I contact Mrs. Donahue. I've already spoken to her and she has offered to play for us."

I entered the room and marveled at its beauty. There were chandeliers and sparkling lusters hanging from a ceiling which was painted with frolicking cherubs. The walls were painted likewise; they also had a narrow-mirrored panels which would reflect the charm of the room multiplying its beauty when it was filled with beautifully gowned women and elegantly clad gentlemen.

Louvered blinds shut out the light, but I went over to the French windows and opened them. Then I opened the doors and let fresh air stream into the

room, relieving it of its closeness. The floor shone and I found it a mite slippery to walk on. I regarded the far end of the room where there was a dais on which stood a piano and harp and several candle-lighted music stands. I stood there, enchanted at the thought of the evening to come when I would be dressed in my first evening gown. All of this joy was due to Clara's graciousness. Regardless of the fact that she was my cousin, I owed her a great deal. I dreaded thinking of the hardships I might have been forced to endure, had it not been for her generosity. I had no further time to dwell on my good fortune for, just then, Neil came in, escorting Mrs. Donahue.

Her good-natured Irish face beamed at the sight of me.

"I think it's a ghastly shame a girl as young and lovely as you never learned how to dance," the housekeeper said as she continued on her way to the dais. Her voice took on a hollow note in the large empty room.

"I firmly agree with you, Mrs. Donahue," Neil said in mock disgust. "That's what comes from growing up in a heathen country."

"If you ask me," Mrs. Donahue said, giving him a tart look, "you're a bit of a heathen yourself."

"Now, now! None of that," Neil said, blithely brushing off her words. "You need me around here to add a little masculine cheer to the place."

"Cheer it could stand," Mrs. Donahue agreed. "And 'tis a pleasure to know there's going to be a ball. 'Twill be good for Miss Clara, but Miss Nancy is the best thing that happened to her since——" she paused and gave Neil a knowing glance.

I could see that nothing daunted Mrs. Donahue and I repressed a smile.

Neil said, "Just for that, I should refuse to assist you onto the dais and you could use a little assistance." He eyed her ample frame in a cynical manner.

"I'll assist meself," she said, sniffing disdainfully.

Nevertheless, Neil did boost her up and it was evident she was grateful for she gave him a grudging smile, then went over to the piano.

I had moved back to the center of the room and I must confess I felt lost in its vastness. Neil reached my side, called to Mrs. Donahue to play a waltz and then he started teaching me the intricacies of the step. As he had said, I had a natural sense of rhythm and, in no time, I was following his strong lead. I found dancing to music quite pleasurable and, if it hadn't been for the strain on little-used muscles, I would have been reluctant for the lesson to end.

However, I did plead fatigue after an hour and was pleased when he told me I was the best student he had ever taught.

Daringly, I said, "And how many other students, sir, did you have?"

"You are my first," he replied, with not even a trace of embarrassment.

"Really, Neil, are you never serious?"

"I would like to be," he replied, "but I dare say you would resent it."

"Are you attempting to flirt with me?"

"I would like very much to do that, but I feel it would avail me nothing."

"You are quite right," I admitted with a smile.

The man was a rascal and made no attempt to hide it.

"Now I must rescue Mrs. Donahue from her island so that she can keep the household from falling into disarray."

"I hear you, you young rapscallion," she called. "I don't know why I stay, with the likes of you in the house."

"Then why don't you leave, my dear lady?" He had reached the dais and extended both hands to her.

Mrs. Donahue placed her hands in his as she replied "Because of Miss Clara and her poor, departed papa. He would want me to look after her, though I feel a great deal easier now that her cousin is here."

"Good heavens," Neil said coolly, "anyone would think we abused the young mistress."

"I never said that," Mrs. Donahue retorted. "Just don't try to soften me up because I know you're nothing but a rapscallion and if Miss Nancy doesn't know it, it's about time she did."

Walking back to me, Neil raised his hands and let them drop expressively, as he said in mock despair, "Alas, my wickedness is now revealed."

"Now that I have been warned about you," I said lightly, "I shall take care."

"Nonsense," he said. "The woman doesn't mean a word of it."

"Don't I though!" Mrs. Donahue spoke from the doorway. "It's me place to show the members of the household the proper respect. Otherwise, I'd give you a tongue-lashing."

And, with those words, she disappeared through

the door. Neil turned to me and I could see that, far from aggravating him, Mrs. Donahue's words had left him amused. It gave me pause for thought because I knew that, though she had spoken half in jest, there was an undercurrent of seriousness in her words.

And so the days passed tranquilly. Clara gave me riding lessons in the morning and, while I felt I did not yet classify as a skilled horsewoman, I was doing rather well. In the afternoon, Neil taught me the intricacies of the dance. Lillian played the piano after the first day so I had no further opportunity to hear any of Mrs. Donahue's observations. I liked the woman and would have liked to converse with her; I felt she knew a great deal that she was keeping to herself. But I could never find a favorable time to strike up a conversation with her. She was always friendly, yet she kept busy and moved briskly along the hallways or through the rooms when I came upon her alone.

There were also the plans for the ball. Lillian was most adept at this sort of thing and both Clara and I listened as she told of the steps she had taken to insure its success. The invitations had gone out quickly and acceptances came in just as rapidly. She gave Clara a guest list for her approval and she didn't strike a single name from it. Afterward, Clara told me she was pleased with Lillian's management of the affair and she was looking forward to it as avidly as I.

Then too, we were busy with the seamstresses who came to the house and remained there while they worked on our gowns. It was fun seeing the beautiful

fabrics cut, basted together, fitted and then, finally, finished off into elaborate dresses. How thrilled I was when I stood in front of the mirror garbed in an exquisite gown the day before the ball and regarded my reflection. I was so excited, I hugged Clara and then Lillian and thanked them for making all this pleasure possible. I was impatient waiting for the following day when the guests would arrive by train from New York City. Others who lived closer would come by carriage. They would all remain the night for there was more than enough room. The musicians, who came from New York, would be housed at the village inn.

NINE

THE GUESTS arrived sporadically the following afternoon and Lillian had the foresight to plan a sumptuous picnic in the gardens under a canopy. It was a good opportunity for me to meet the guests and I was thrilled as I was escorted by Neil and introduced to politicians, actors, actresses, members of New York society, doctors, lawyers, and men high in the industrial fields. Yet, Lillian was a splendid hostess and organizer and I couldn't help but feel a twinge of pride in her accomplishments.

Clara, too, was pleased as she mingled with the guests, but always on the arm of Raymond Hayes who seemed quite content with her. Again, I wished that he could fall in love with her. That she worshipped him was obvious, for her features glowed with her adoration. But I caught no such look on his face although I stole several glances in their direction. He was attentive, courteous, and amiable, but I felt that, so far as Clara was concerned, it went no further.

Afterward, we retired to our suites to rest until

evening. However, I found it impossible to nap. I was too impatient to wait for the evening festivities to begin. The rooms and the ballroom had been decorated with flowers, both garden and hothouse varieties, and Lillian had also supervised that. It seemed to me that she should have been exhausted, but she fairly beamed with the same excitement which infused the three of us.

Dinner was a glittering two and one-half hours of many courses, beautifully served, wonderfully prepared. The dining room was an imposing one, with dark-paneled walls, but they were well-polished and reflected the light of the chandeliers and candelabras. The jewels the women wore added to the brilliance. In all my girlish dreams of grandeur, I had never come close to visualizing such an enchanting affair.

The lilt of the music played by a famous orchestra was enough to set the feet tapping. I felt quite competent on the dance floor and it was eminently satisfying to be sought after by members of the stronger sex. As I was whirled past Neil who was dancing with his mother, he gave me a satisfied nod. I smiled my gratitude for, indeed, he had never missed an afternoon in teaching me the art of terpsichore. And, after I left him, I taught Clara all I had learned from him. So she was as adept as I and, judging from her face as she danced with Raymond, she was ecstatic.

Regarding Clara, I felt a cold band of fear around my heart, and I missed a step. My partner gave me a smile of apology, even though it was my fault. She was no longer holding her feelings for Raymond in check and, somehow, I knew she was going to be hurt.

She was bound to be, for this evening, Raymond was not allowing her to monopolize him. I had seen him moving among the guests, dancing with girls our age and also with their mothers.

Somehow, I got the feeling that Raymond, even when he was supposedly relaxing, was actually working. He would dance with the mothers and daughters of those who would be of benefit to him and his business firm. He could become an instant success by marrying Clara for she was wealthy, but he had already told me he would not do that. If I doubted him before, I no longer did. But this I knew—he was not in love with Clara. All her hopes were in vain and I wondered how she would react when she was finally convinced she could never win him. I dreaded to think of it.

Once, while she was waiting for Raymond to finish a dance with someone else, I eased my way through the crowd over to her.

"Clara, let us go outside for a breath of air. I find it rather stifling in here."

"No, no, Nancy," she said impatiently, her eyes never leaving her beloved as he moved about on the dance floor. "I must remain here to dance with Raymond."

"Let him wonder about you," I suggested.

"Don't talk that way," she retorted, almost angrily. "I love him. I told you so. I want to be with him every moment possible."

Clara paused and then, as the music changed tempo and the dancers on the floor switched partners, her face clouded with anger.

I followed her gaze and saw that Raymond was

now dancing with Lillian. They danced beautifully together. Raymond was graceful and polished, and Lillian followed his lead with evident skill. Watching them was a sheer delight. Lillian was dancing with her eyes half closed and her enjoyment was apparent.

"That hussy!" Clara exclaimed angrily.

"Hush, Clara," I pleaded. "It is only a dance and it's quite obvious Lillian likes Raymond because he is such a good dancer."

"She likes him because he is young and vital," Clara countered, in a low savage voice. "I hate her! Despite all she did to make this ball a success, I hate her! I cannot abide the woman!"

"Pray, do not upset yourself," I said. "If you feel this way, I shall be afraid to dance with Raymond myself."

"No one is going to dance with him again tonight except me," Clara stated, her voice rising. "If Lillian attempts to again, I shall make a scene. I swear it."

This time Clara made no effort to keep her voice quiet and the guests near us could not help but overhear.

I knew further reasoning would be useless so I moved away from her—knowing the dance was near its end—and I casually made my way to the spot where Lillian and Raymond would be when the music stopped. I just managed to reach them at the proper moment.

I grasped Lillian's arm lightly and said, "May I speak with you, please? A matter of importance."

"Of course," she said, though she looked rather surprised.

Raymond smiled at me. "Pray, save me a dance. I've been looking around for you, but you seem to be evading me."

Actually, I had been because of Clara. "I fear my dances have all been taken, Raymond. You'll have to wait until the next ball."

"That's hardly fair," the lawyer argued. "Can't you manage it?"

Before I could reply, Clara had reached my side.

"Raymond," she said accusingly, "you promised we would dance most of the dances together."

For a moment, he looked slightly perturbed, but, just as quickly, a smile crossed his features. "I believe it was you who said we would do that thing, Clara, but I have clients here and I cannot ignore them."

"Fiddlesticks to your clients," Clara scoffed. "You're dancing with me for the remainder of the evening. I insist on it for I believe I'm your wealthiest client and I take precedence."

"Come, Lillian," I said.

"Yes, Lillian," Clara said, her voice a challenge, "do go with Nancy. I want her to tell you what I just said about you."

Color flushed Lillian's face, but she attempted a smile and followed me from the room. We retired to the den of my late uncle. Our festive apparel seemed strangely out of place in the dismal drab room.

"I suppose," Lillian started the conversation, "Clara told you she hated me."

I frowned. "Lillian, she has a very strong infatua-

tion for Raymond and, because of that, she resents your dancing with him."

"She is in love with him," Lillian contradicted, her tone irritable, "and she resents anyone dancing with him. She is a very possessive creature. She behaved in the same fashion when I married her father."

"Nevertheless, I feel it would be wise not to antagonize her," I reasoned. "She might make a scene and everything has gone so beautifully up until now——"

"Very well," Lillian said, relenting, "I shall keep my distance from him for the remainder of the evening. Instead, I shall dance only with my son or someone older than I."

"Just so you don't dance with Raymond," I said.

"I shan't. But I'm getting quite tired of catering to Clara. You know, of course, that Raymond isn't in love with her."

"I don't know——"

"Of course, you do. Anyone can see it. Just as anyone can see that she is silly in love with him."

"Please don't be unkind, Lillian."

She started to pace back and forth before the desk. "How can I help it? You know she believes that either Neil or I tried to throw you off the balcony and made a similar attempt on her a week earlier. However, I give you my word I did no such thing, nor would my son be guilty of such an act."

"I believe you," I said, "and I hope, in time, to convince Clara of that. But meanwhile, let us not antagonize her. Even I refused to dance with Raymond tonight."

"You're foolish to indulge her so," Lillian said, "but you are truly a kindhearted girl. Very well. I have given you my word. Let us go back. Our absence will cause talk for those who overheard."

"I agree."

So we returned to the ballroom where Neil immediately approached me. Instead of requesting a dance, he asked permission to bring me a glass of punch. When he handed it to me, he confided that he had placed a dollop of sherry in it. I gave him a chiding glance, but I tasted it and found it quite delicious. When I had finished it, he suggested we take a walk outside. I acquiesced as I felt the quiet would serve to calm me. Clara's outburst of temper had upset me more than I realized.

We moved along the garden paths and Neil for some reason referred to the night I had been nearly thrown to my death. It depressed me for I had succeeded in keeping it off my mind since nothing untoward had happened since.

"I know Clara suspects me," Neil said, "but I assure you, Nancy, I would never do such a thing. I did hear a scream, then another. I was in the library at the rear of the house, but the windows were open. I was fully dressed for I had been reading. I rushed out as quickly as possible to see where the cries came from and that was when you saw me."

"I believe you, Neil."

"However, someone had leaped down from the balcony."

"Did you see anyone?" I asked, in quick surprise.

"No, but I found the heel marks of boots in the damp grass."

"Boots? Then it was a man?"

"With little question. But who?"

"I could scarcely answer that as I am practically a stranger here."

"Do you believe the stranger mistook you for Clara?"

"I'm not certain. If he was an intruder, possibly no. If it was someone who disliked Clara for some reason, possibly yes."

"It would not be difficult for me to find a reason to dislike Clara."

"But you do not dislike me."

"No. Nor would I mistake you for Clara."

"Must we speak of such things tonight?"

"Pray, forgive me. It's just that I would like to win your favor. I fear that day the horse ran away——"

"I told you I had forgotten it."

"But I haven't."

"Then, please do so. I hold nothing against you, Neil. I enjoy your company. I would like us to be friends. I feel that we already are."

"That is what I wanted to hear from you." I could see his features in the lights flowing from the house and he looked pleased. "I am developing quite a fondness for you, Nancy."

"Do not forget that I said we could be *friends*. I am not prepared to go beyond that."

"You are outspoken," he said.

"I think I read your mind," I replied with a smile.

"I dare say you do. Suppose we return to the house?"

"An excellent idea."

Inside, we met Clara whose eyes still held an ec-

static look though Raymond was nowhere in sight.

"We just danced together," she told me, "but some gentleman asked him to join him for a drink. However, when Raymond returns, we are going to take a stroll in the gardens. He wishes to speak with me."

"How nice," I said, wondering if, perhaps, I could have been wrong about him.

"Oh, Nancy," she exclaimed, "I do hope he is going to tell me of his love for me. Sometimes, I fear he does not care for me at all, and that the attention he has given me is due solely to the fact that I am a highly valued client of his firm."

"Now you are letting your imagination run away with you," I told her. "You mustn't be unfair to the man. You must remember he is a very proud gentleman."

Neil, who had left our side, returned with a glass of punch for Clara. "Permit me," he said, bowing slightly and offering the glass to her. "You look quite beautiful in your green gown. You are, without a doubt, one of the two most beautiful young ladies in the room."

"Oh, Neil," she scoffed, though accepting the glass, "you are silly. But thank you for bringing the drink to me."

He nodded and moved away, slightly miffed at her remark. I was secretly amused, for Mrs. Donahue had said far worse to him, but from her he didn't resent it. However, with Clara, he sensed her dislike and objected to her touch of levity.

Clara sipped her drink and looked at me with a rather startled expression on her face. "This punch tastes different——"

"You are overly suspicious," I said. "Neil added a little sherry. He did the same with mine and it was delicious."

She took another swallow and nodded. "Yes, I do taste the sherry. It's quite different. Papa would never let me taste wine, but I think I'm old enough now——"

"It is one of the few times I've had it," I said with a smile. "My papa was as strict as yours, but I do believe that, in this modern age, a dram of sherry in our punch will not demoralize us. After all, we are each nearing our twentieth birthday."

"I do like it," Clara said, drinking deeply from her glass. Then she spoke again of the man who occupied her every thought. "Isn't Raymond a superb dancer?"

"He is," I admitted. "Though I haven't danced with him, I watched him on the floor. He is quite exceptional."

"It was kind of you not to dance with him," Clara said. "I'm sure he must have asked you."

"He was merely being polite," I reassured her.

"You know," she confided, her smile self-conscious, "with Raymond, I am jealous even where you are concerned."

"There is no need to be. He thinks of me as a friend and that is how I regard him."

"But Lillian doesn't think that way," Clara said, her face tensing. "If she could take him away from me, she would. But if she ever attempts to do so, I shall banish her from these premises; she will never return."

I was looking over Clara's shoulder and I caught

a glimpse of Raymond and Lillian in the hall. She was looking up at him, speaking animatedly, and he was obviously enjoying what she was saying for his smile was both warm and amused.

I tried to keep concern from my features as I said, "Please stop this nonsense and begin enjoying yourself. That's what this affair is for. And when you aren't happy, then I can't be. And please, dear Cousin, forget this senseless jealousy. Jealousy is an evil and corrupting emotion."

"You are right," Clara said, her smile abashed. "I don't want to spoil this evening for you. Not when it is so nearly over. It's been perfect so far." She looked around, seeking a glimpse of Raymond. "Oh, I do wish he would return. I am most eager to leave this room and seek the seclusion of the gardens."

"Have patience, Raymond will come."

I started to talk about the various intriguing people I had met during the afternoon and again this evening, in an effort to hold her attention so that she would not look around. It wasn't easy, for I could see she wasn't particularly interested in what I was saying. It seemed an aeon before Lillian moved away from Raymond to address another guest. Much to my relief, Raymond headed our way; he was just in time to prevent a scene for Clara turned and watched him approach.

It was pathetic to see the way she grasped his arm. "You'll have to excuse us, Nancy," she said. "Raymond and I are going outside."

"Run along," I said casually. "I'm going to seek another dancing partner."

"You shouldn't lack for them," Raymond replied graciously. But his eyes were somber and the mood of gaiety I had felt during the early part of the evening was dispelled.

That was the last time I saw Clara that evening and I was puzzled by her absence, for I caught a glimpse of Raymond later, talking with guests, though I didn't see him on the dance floor again. Finally, the ball was over and Lillian was bidding the guests good night.

I remained with her until the last guest had retired and the members of the orchestra went out to their carriages to be driven to the village. I looked about again, seeking Clara for, as hostess, she should have been there to bid good night to the few guests who left in their carriages for their homes nearby, but she was nowhere in sight. Raymond was remaining overnight and had already retired. Neil approached Lillian and me and bade us good night in a rather tipsy manner, but his mother had no words of censure for his behavior.

"Neil finds so little opportunity to enjoy himself, I hardly blame him if he indulges and I did see some of the men inviting him to join them for brandy. It will but make him sleep better and give him a headache in the morning to remember the night by."

I smiled agreement. "It was a beautiful ball, Lillian, and I thank you for all you did to make it so. And now, I believe I, too, shall retire. I know I shall have pleasant dreams tonight."

"I hope so, my dear. I am fatigued also. Mrs. Donahue will supervise the servants in seeing that the

house is secured and the candles and lamps extinguished. And thank you for your kind words. Your girlish enthusiasm made it all worth while."

Lillian and I walked upstairs together in weary silence. As we approached Lillian's suite, we could hear someone crying disconsolately. We quickly traced the sound to Clara's suite. From behind her closed door, the sobbing was heart-rending.

I tapped on her door. "Clara, it is I, Nancy. Do let me in."

"Go away, Nancy. Please go away," came the sobbing reply.

"I wish to speak to you," I said in a low voice, not wanting the other guests to hear. "Please, I beg of you, allow me to enter."

"I do not wish to see you. I do not wish to see anyone," came the voice, racked with sobs. "Go away. I will not let you in. I will not let anyone in."

"What do you suppose happened?" Lillian asked. "She was radiant all evening, except when I danced with Raymond."

"I do not know," I replied. "If only she would permit me to speak with her."

"I think it would only antagonize her were you to enter," Lillian reasoned, and wisely, I felt, though I ached to comfort my lonely cousin.

"You are right," I replied. "Perhaps when her tears have spent themselves, she will fall asleep for she must be as exhausted as we."

"Let us hope so, poor unhappy child," Lillian replied. "I bid you good night, Nancy. I hope this," she motioned to Clara's closed door, "will not spoil your sleep or your pleasant dreams."

"I fear my concern for her will scarcely let me sleep," I replied.

"You will sleep," Lillian said with assurance. "I feel it behooves me to tell you that Clara has had these emotional disturbances before. However, this is the first one I have been aware of since you came here. I had hoped they had ended."

"If only she would let me comfort her," I said and my hand went out to turn the knob.

Lillian reached out and grasped my wrist lightly. "I tried to do the same thing once and she went into a rage," she warned. "At such a time, when the house is filled with guests, I fear it would be most unwise."

My hand dropped to my side. "You are right. I will retire and hope for sleep. Good night, Lillian."

I went to my own rooms and stepped out onto the balcony for a moment. I felt no fear that night out there, for the house was filled with guests although the darkness was as intense as the night I'd been attacked and there was a closeness in the air that seemed to forebode a storm.

I glanced over at the French doors of Clara's rooms. They were closed, but soft yellow candlelight came from them. At least, she wasn't sobbing her heart out in darkness. I returned to my room, wondering at the reason for it. True, she had disappeared from the ball, while Raymond remained there, yet his face bore no trace of a quarrel.

I returned to my own room and prepared for bed. While I brushed my hair, I realized that I was beset with a strange apprehension. Up until the moment when I had heard Clara sobbing bitterly in the pri-

vacy of her rooms, I'd felt only the gay spell of the ball and the exciting people around me. Her sobbing had robbed me of all that gaiety. Now, I was actually worried.

I didn't know why or about what. Perhaps with the excitement ended, I was once again aware of that terrible moment when I had thought I was going to be thrown over the balcony railing. Had that come back to me because of Clara's weeping? My heart ached for that lonely lovesick girl and I longed with all my being to go to her. Yet I dared not.

Then I thought again of the intruder. What if he should return despite all the people in the house? What if he were actually one of the guests? But that was ridiculous. I gave a shrug of impatience at my worrisome thoughts and extinguished the lamp, but I found sleep impossible.

Soon I found myself sitting on the side of the bed, thinking about Clara again. Quite on impulse, I slipped my feet into my satin slippers and threw a dressing gown over my shoulders before I ventured out onto the balcony. It must have been nearly four o'clock, I judged. The heavens had cleared off somewhat and, while there was no moon, there were a few stars visible; consequently, there was only weak light, but enough so that I could view at least a part of the balcony and be sure that no one lurked in the nearby shadows.

I made my way to Clara's window. The light was out and she was no longer sobbing. I felt much better and I hoped she was asleep at last. I retraced my steps, got into bed once more and tried to clear

my mind. Gradually, I could feel consciousness ebb from my weary body as I drifted off to sleep.

I don't know what wakened me, but it seemed that, at the exact moment I opened my eyes, I heard a heavy thumping sound. At first, I thought someone had fallen in the house and I sat and listened for further sounds of movement, but there was nothing but silence.

Yet that sound had been definite; the house had even seemed to shake a trifle. What could have caused this? I asked myself. A heavy object dropped——? A door slammed?

I sat bolt upright in bed. A heavy object—it had come from close by the balcony. And suddenly the answer came. What I heard had been the sound of —a body—landing on the brick pavement of the courtyard.

I dashed onto the balcony entirely oblivious of the fact that I might be running head-on into danger if what I suspected had actually happened. But no one was there. I hastened to the rail and looked over.

In a white nightdress, a feminine body, lying limp and spread out on the red bricks, could be seen plainly. Only starlight illuminated the grim scene, but it was sufficient to disclose the horror. From where I stood, I could not be sure who it was although my suspicions were strong.

I raced to Clara's room. The French doors were opened widely, the lace curtains moving weakly in the faint breeze. Clara's bed was empty; her robe lay across the foot of it; her slippers were beside it.

I checked the urge to scream. Instead, I hurried

back to my room, stepped into my slippers, and pulled on my dressing gown as I ran to Lillian's door and knocked several times. Then I made my way to Neil's room and did the same.

In a few moments, mother and son emerged, sleepy-eyed and distressed. I signaled them to be quiet and we sped downstairs. At the front door, I told them what had happened.

"Dear God!" Lillian cried. "We have failed her. The three of us failed her!"

We rushed out, Neil carrying a lamp. We found Clara, and turned her slightly so that her sightless eyes stared upwards at the stars. She seemed to be unmarked, but she was dead and, when we moved her again, I saw why.

Her neck had been broken.

I threw back my head and screamed. I couldn't help it. My horror and my fear were so intense that I had no control over my emotions. I screamed and kept on screaming and fought off Lillian as she tried to gather me into her arms to quiet me.

TEN

I SAT IN the gloomy little village courtroom and listened to the steady procession of witnesses, all with the same story to tell.

The servants, the hostlers, a village doctor, some of the guests who had been previously acquainted with Clara and were in that house the fateful night —all gave the same statement. That Clara had been given to periods of despondency since the death of her father. That she would remain in her room for days at a time. Even poor Mrs. Donahue, tears streaming down her face, was forced to testify that she had heard Clara make threats to kill herself, though she added she would never believe that the girl had carried them out. Nor would I, I thought to myself.

The doctor testified that he was well aware of Clara's suicidal tendencies, but there was little he could do about it except to hope that, as she grew older and time elapsed, she would settle down and become a less emotional young lady.

When it came my turn, following Lillian's brief

stay on the stand, I told of hearing her sob bitterly. I related how I had begged her, through the door, to allow me to enter, but she refused me permission. I told of stepping out on my balcony and noting there was a light streaming from the French doors of her room. Then, when I had gone out some time later, I had noted that her room was in darkness. Feeling reassured, I had returned to my bed and found solace in sleep. Later, I was awakened by I know not what, but almost at the same instant of my awakening, I heard the horrible thud which had been caused by the impact of Clara's body.

So the jury of six men arrived at a verdict without leaving their chairs: suicide brought on by unreasoning sorrow over the death of her father. I felt a pang of guilt as I heard the verdict read, for I wondered about the truth of it.

And I had cause to because, after the guests had left the estate the morning following the ball, Raymond, Lillian, and I were seated in the little den discussing the tragedy. He related to us how he had been forced to reveal to Clara that he was not in love with her and that he had no intention of marrying her. He acknowledged that it had been brutal of him, but he had no recourse other than to do so, for she had revealed her love for him in the gardens that night even before he'd had a chance to tell her that he regarded her as a friend, that he was exceedingly fond of her, but it could be nothing more than that.

I cried when Raymond finished speaking for I know now the reason for Clara's disconsolate sobbing. I must say that Raymond was as deeply shaken

by the tragedy as I, though possibly for a different reason. He went on to say that if his interview with Clara were brought out and published in the New York newspapers, he would lose his position with the very staid, respectable law firm with which he was associated. His statement didn't surprise me for I knew him to be an extremely ambitious young man. Also, though he had hurt Clara by his revelation, he had been honest with her. She had, apparently, not been able to withstand the shock.

Raymond asked both Lillian and me not to reveal what he had told us. In all justice, I will say his face flamed with embarrassment as he beseeched us to keep his secret. Lillian agreed readily. I hesitated, for I thought of the night the intruder had attempted to throw me over the railing. I even mentioned it to them. It was the first time Raymond had heard of it and I was surprised that Clara hadn't told him about it, but he had been at Cliffside only briefly before the ball and then only to acquire Clara's signature on several documents.

Raymond seemed surprised at the information, but I assured him that nothing had happened to me since and I believed it to be an intruder who had been frightened away by Neil when he searched the estate armed with a gun after the would-be murderer was routed by Clara's screams. So I agreed to keep Raymond's confidence rather than to have him lose his position. Naught would be gained now by revealing my cousin's intimate conversation. It would also be humiliating to Clara's memory. Therefore, I swore myself to silence on the matter.

I arose with the others and began walking out of

the courtroom. Just as I stepped outside, I came face to face with the redheaded man who had followed me through the copse on the estate. He looked directly at me, smiled, and nodded as if he had known me all his life. Then he moved aside so that I might pass. I was astounded at his brazenness and I felt a deep twinge of annoyance at his audacity. I wondered who he might be and made so bold as to turn around. Though he was easily six feet tall, he had disappeared. Therefore, I could not ask the others who he was.

I rode back to the estate in the carriage with Lillian, Neil, and Raymond Hayes, who carried with him a large bulging envelope of legal documents. We were silent, each with our own thoughts of the anguish the desolate girl had suffered on her last night on this earth.

Poor Clara, now entombed in the vault not far behind the great house, no longer needed help. She had lived in fear of her life, yet had taken it when she had been forsaken by Raymond. Why did that thought keep spiraling around in my mind? Was I trying to convince myself? Could that intruder have come back? If so, we were doing Clara a disservice in dismissing her death as suicide. She, herself, had told me she would never have taken her own life. Why hadn't I thought of it in the courtroom? And why hadn't I spoken of the assailant who had lifted me to throw me over the railing? Was I afraid of being thought queer? Or did I fear being laughed at? I knew neither was true.

It was only that I believed Clara, thoroughly despondent, had taken her life. Yet, it seemed as if I

were trying to convince myself. My brain was weary of trying to solve the puzzle, so I considered my future status at Cliffside. I was well aware that it had changed upon Clara's untimely death and I knew I would have to leave as soon as possible.

We reached the house finally and entered. It seemed as dismal as the mausoleum where Clara's body was now resting. There was a different air about Lillian now, as if she were mistress and everyone should be aware of the fact. I noticed no change in Neil other than that he was somewhat freer in his use of the sherry and the brandy bottles.

Which brought me to another puzzle. I was certain Clara had not cried out the night she died and that thought lent credence to the fact that she had committed suicide. But suppose she were incapable of crying out? I thought of the glass of punch laced with sherry which Neil had given her. She had never before tasted it. What if she had imbibed more of this beverage, perhaps at Neil's urging, so that she had gone to bed with her senses partly numbed by the wine? I knew Clara would never have done such a thing under ordinary circumstances. But, after her love had been scorned, she could have been so filled with despair, that she became utterly reckless. Possibly, too much wine had also been the cause of her sobbing that night. I had heard of people who cried uncontrollably when intoxicated. Suppose the intruder had returned that night and she had been completely unable to cry out for help? I shuddered at the thought, for if it were true, we were doing the girl's memory a grave injustice in branding her a suicide.

I knew all of these were mere speculations and, as such, I could not give voice to my suspicions. What I wanted now was to leave these premises forever. I would beseech Lillian to sell the Buddha for whatever it would bring and the sum realized, together with what I already had, would sustain me until I found work. Perhaps Raymond's kind offer to study the operation of the new writing machine coming into use was still open. I had heard that female typists were paid as high as fourteen dollars a week and that was, indeed, a goodly sum for a young lady to make.

At that moment, however, we were gathered together for the reading of Clara's last will and testament which Raymond carried among the legal papers in the heavy envelope. We seated ourselves in the library which was the place best suited for this ceremony.

Raymond appropriated the desk and spread several documents before him. He was about ready to begin the reading when Mrs. Donahue bustled in, somewhat startled at the news she had to give us.

"Mister and Miss Seaton have come to pay their respects."

Lillian sighed. "Let them come in, please. I am not interested in carrying on a feud that never should have begun. They are our neighbors. Let us treat them as such."

Arthur Seaton walked in with his sister on his arm. Her appearance surprised me, for while Arthur was heavy-set, strong, and virile, Virginia Seaton was frail, small, and probably looked much older than her actual years. They both acted with con-

siderable dignity and expressed their sorrow over Clara's death. Lillian then introduced them and, when Arthur Seaton took my hand, the only indication he gave that we had met once before was a slight twinkle in his eye directed at me alone.

Lillian said, "Mr. Hayes is about to read poor Clara's will. We doubt there is anything secret in it. You and your sister are welcome to stay, Mr. Seaton."

The pair seated themselves and Raymond again picked up the document; he read it to us in slow, measured tones. It was a very simple will. In it, Clara first gave Mrs. Donahue two thousand dollars, a thousand went to the head hostler, and a similar sum to an old gardener, since retired, whom I had never seen. After that, everything, personal and real, was left to Lillian. There certainly wasn't a surprise in it, for who else could she have left the estate to? Lillian should have inherited the bulk of it from Clara's father long ago.

Raymond folded the document and replaced it in the envelope. Lillian looked about for a moment. Then she seemed to come to a very sudden decision.

"Thank heaven, this is over at last. Nancy, I do not know your plans, but I do hope you will not worry about anything for I shall see to it you are well provided for. My husband loved your father as only a brother can, and you will certainly not be destitute."

"Thank you, Lillian," I said, "but your beneficence is unnecessary. I do have some small means, and I ask only that you dispose of the Buddha. I shall find employment at once. It will help to take my mind off the tragedy of my cousin's death."

"Very well, although I shall take steps at once to place this estate on the market."

I gasped aloud. "But Lillian—you can't mean that——"

"I most certainly do. I feel no attachment for this gloomy old house nor these acres. Had I inherited while Clara lived, I should not have taken this step, but the last of the Furnivalls is now gone—except for you, Nancy. It is time this property passed into other hands."

Mrs. Donahue suddenly burst into tears and fled from the room. Neil had stepped out and now returned with a glass of what looked more like brandy than sherry. He sipped it and appeared unimpressed by his mother's revelation.

Lillian motioned me to come sit beside her on the sofa.

"I'm sorry," she said to me, "but Cliffside has never been a very happy place for me. Aaron grew ill soon after we married. Then, upon his death I had to live with the enmity of poor Clara, which was not warranted, I assure you. But, after this last tragedy, I wish only to rid myself of the place. I know full well it holds a warm spot in your heart, for you knew it as a child and you are a Furnivall. But I have no such sentiments regarding it, nor do I consider it a place of beauty. Hence, my desire to be free of it."

Arthur Seaton spoke for the first time. "It is my belief that you are mistaken, Mrs. Furnivall. Cliffside is one of the loveliest places in the entire Hudson Valley. You must be aware you will receive but

a pittance for it because such estates as this are not in demand on the current market."

"Then a pittance it shall be," Lillian declared. "Aaron left me more than enough cash and bonds. I do not care to discuss this any further, if you please——"

Raymond was beginning to arise and I was already on my feet when Mrs. Donahue entered again and on her heels came the redheaded stranger who had stalked me on the estate and whom I had last seen in the coroner's courtroom. His face was set in serious lines as he moved directly to the desk.

"Mr. Hayes," he said, "I am Tim Kenton."

Suddenly, I remembered what Clara had told me. *If I die, Cousin Nancy—dear Cousin Nancy—you must find a man in the village named Kenton. Timothy Kenton. Everyone calls him 'Tim.' Go to him —tell him who you are. Do this quickly—if anything happens to me. Or you may share my terrible fate.*

Oh, dear God, why hadn't I thought of it before? Not that I was fearful for my own life, but I chided myself that Clara should have made such a plea and that, due to shock, I had let it slip from my mind. However, there was no further time to dwell on it because Raymond was introducing us to Mr. Kenton.

Mr. Kenton acknowledged the introductions and I thought I could detect a look of contempt on his features as he regarded Neil, who still had glass in hand. Neil didn't even arise when Mr. Kenton had entered the room. Perhaps because he had quaffed too much brandy.

Mr. Kenton turned his attention back to Raymond.

"Mr. Hayes, I am an attorney. I live in this village and I practice here. I presume you have already read what you believe to be the last will and testament of Clara Furnivall."

"I have, sir," Raymond said, regarding Mr. Kenton curiously.

"Then I must tell you the will you have just read is invalid, for Clara Furnivall made another will two weeks prior to her death."

Obviously, his words stunned the people in the room. Lillian gasped and a hand went to her throat. Neil's glass slipped from his hand and dropped to the floor and broke, the liquor spilling on the rug. Miss Seaton sat there with her mouth open, while her brother regarded Mr. Kenton waiting eagerly to further hear from him.

Even Raymond, always so poised, had momentarily lost his composure.

"I must say this comes as a surprise to me. May I ask where Miss Clara Furnivall made out her new will?" he asked.

"It was made in my office in the presence of four witnesses and a judge, for Miss Furnivall had become convinced someone would argue the validity of the document. Likewise, a physician was present to verify that she was neither unsound of mind, nor upset, nor coerced. Do you wish to read the document, sir, or shall I? It takes but a moment. I shall produce the depositions of all witnesses at your request."

"But Clara has done business with my law firm for years. Her father and his father before him——"

"I grant that, Mr. Hayes. What inspired her to handle this as she did, I cannot say, but this will su-

persedes any previous wills and, I assure you, it is valid and legal."

Raymond sat down slowly. "Read it, sir. We shall take up its validity later."

Tim Kenton placed the document on the desk. "There is no need to read it *in toto*. It grants everything to Nancy Furnivall without restriction except that, in her lifetime, Cliffside must never be sold."

I arose slowly. "But I do not understand——"

"This is impossible!" Lillian cried out.

Neil arose, went over to a table on which a carafe of liquid and glasses stood. He poured a generous portion into a glass, emptied it, then half filled the glass again. Mrs. Donahue had brightened at the news and she moved over to pick up the broken pieces of the glass which Neil had dropped. Lillian looked so stricken I felt pity for her. Raymond was studying the document with a stunned look on his face.

Mr. Kenton stepped over to face me and bowed slightly.

"Miss Furnivall," he said in a low tone, "if there is any way in which I may serve you, please feel free to call upon me. As for now, unless you have further questions I will leave."

"Not quite yet, Mr. Kenton," I said. "I wish to speak to you privately." I turned to Lillian. "I am too overwhelmed by this to know what to think, except that I wish you and Neil to consider Cliffside as much your home as it is mine."

"Thank you, my dear," Lillian said, managing a smile, for she knew my manner toward her was quite different from the one she had assumed only minutes ago. "I shall consider it."

Virginia Seaton came up to me and touched my arm. "I am so happy for you, my dear. May you live a long time to enjoy this beautiful estate."

"Thank you, Miss Seaton."

Arthur Seaton gave me a toothy smile. "I do hope you will not continue to carry on this feud, Miss Nancy. I have no desire to, and certainly, no reason for it."

"Nor have I, Mr. Seaton," I assured him. "As for the brick wall, I do not like it and I shall have both you and your sister over for tea soon and we will discuss tearing it down."

The Seatons nodded farewells to Lillian and Neil and left the room. Arthur trying to curb his sturdy strides to match those of his sister's mincing little steps. I thought of them as aristocracy. At least, I could think of no other word for Virginia as I observed the old-fashioned bonnet perched atop her head with ribbons coming down to be tied into a pert bow beneath her chin.

As if at a signal, Lillian and Neil, who had a little difficulty rising from his chair, left the room. I could see that Clara's later will had had a most depressing effect on them which was understandable.

Raymond moved over to my side.

"I must go back to New York City at once and report the new developments in connection with the will," the young attorney said. "I must say they were most unexpected, but Clara's final will, which Mr. Kenton produced, is unquestionably valid. I'll return as quickly as possible to take up many other matters pertaining to the estate. May I ask if you will continue to use the law firm which I represent?"

"For the present, Raymond," I said noncommittally.

I suppose I was being a little unfair, but I couldn't help feeling a slight resentment that he was forever thinking of his firm and never of the welfare of the individuals who supported it. Also, I felt that he had been unfair in extracting a promise from me to remain silent concerning his rejection of Clara's love. It was for my cousin's memory that I had given my promise, but that did not obviate my objection to Raymond's selfishness.

Mrs. Donahue, her hands holding a basket in which she had placed the broken pieces of glass, came over to me.

"The saints be praised," the housekeeper said, "that you'll be the new mistress of Cliffside. But take care, Miss Nancy, take care."

"I will, Mrs. Donahue," I replied, placing a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "And, be assured, Cliffside shall remain as it was. Except perhaps, for the wall of hatred."

"Bless you," she said, managing a smile. Then, carrying the basket, she left the room.

There was only Mr. Kenton left. He was still standing by the desk. Now he walked over to me.

"Mr. Kenton, may I suggest a walk about the grounds? I feel the need for air, and the day is beautiful."

"I would relish it," he replied.

We left the library, moving through the reception hall at a brisk pace and out onto the porch. There, I stood a moment, surveying the vast estate which now was mine. I vowed to maintain it in a way that

would do justice to my ownership and be a tribute to poor Clara. I did feel the weight of this new responsibility and it was difficult for me to grow accustomed to the fact that a few moments ago I'd been all but penniless and in the act of setting up a pattern for my working life. Now, I was wealthy, and I had shouldered all the cares riches can bring.

For a moment, I had forgotten the tall young man by my side. But, as I started down the steps and he moved alongside me, I looked up abruptly.

"I know what you are thinking, Miss Furnivall," Mr. Kenton said. "But I feel that you are a sensible young lady and will be quite capable of administering the affairs of this estate."

"Thank you, Mr. Kenton. I do hope so, but I would give anything to have my cousin here by my side. I am still terribly confused by her death. It is difficult to believe she, who had everything to live for, would commit suicide."

"I fear I share the same viewpoint," the lawyer replied. "And may I express my condolences over your tragic loss?"

"Thank you, sir," I said, leading the way to a section of the estate which I had not traversed before.

We entered a grove of trees, then came upon an opening in the center of which was a gazebo. I cried out in surprise for I suddenly recalled having played in it as a child.

"My, I had forgotten about this! Clara and I played here often and we particularly loved to remain here under the protection of its pagodalike roof when there were light summer rains."

"Would you care to revisit it?" he asked, smiling down at me.

"Pray, let us do just that," I replied, with the first trace of enthusiasm I had displayed since the death of Clara, three days before.

There were built-in benches around the inside of the structure. Mr. Kenton dusted off one section with his handkerchief and stood aside while I seated myself.

"Do be seated, Mr. Kenton," I said.

He did so, resting an arm on the railing of the gazebo and regarding me quite frankly. I felt a slight discomfort under his intense scrutiny and I wasn't certain I liked it. This young man had a way of making me feel ill at ease and I couldn't understand why.

"Mr. Kenton, do you know the exact day when Clara came to you?"

"I think you will recall it better when I tell you it was the morning after someone attempted to throw you from the balcony."

"Then you know about that?" I asked.

"I do, and I was quite surprised you did not mention it at the inquest."

"I feared I might not be believed." I said, coloring slightly. "You see, I wanted to go to the constable after that horrible incident occurred, but Clara dissuaded me from doing so. She feared——" I paused.

"She feared she would be thought mentally ill," he finished for me.

"So she took you into her confidence."

"Completely," he assured me. "That is why I find it difficult to believe she committed suicide."

"Pray believe me, Mr. Kenton, when I tell you I would never have entertained such a thought except for something which was not brought out in the courtroom."

"And what was that?"

His eyes, regarding me, were almost a challenge. I knew my words had shocked him, perhaps even made him angry.

"I pledged my silence on the matter, but——"

"May I remind you, Miss Furnivall, that your cousin is dead; her death was found legally to be a suicide. I, for one, do not believe she took her own life."

"Nor I," I cried out, completely overcome with a feeling of guilt. "And I do not blame you for regarding me with such scorn——"

"Then, I beg of you, in the sake of common decency, to tell me what I should know, yet do not. You see, I have been away for a week and returned only this morning. I had just reached the courtroom when the proceedings ended."

"It concerns Raymond Hayes."

"In what way?"

"Clara was in love with him. Terribly, hopelessly in love. He did not return her love and he told her so the night of the ball. He revealed this information to Lillian, Neil, and me confidentially after Clara's death. That is what I believed to be the reason for her suicide, particularly since I had heard her sobbing in such a heartbreaking fashion."

"It does lend credence to a suicide motive," Mr.

Kenton reasoned. "I was not aware of the love she had for Mr. Hayes."

"But there is something else I thought of," I said.

Then I told this trustworthy lawyer of the glass of punch Neil had given Clara; that it was the first time she had taken an intoxicating beverage. I doubted that one glass would have caused a crying spell, but I wondered if she might not have had more —particularly after her rejection by Raymond.

"I have no proof of it," I added, "but, since she didn't cry out when she died, I wondered if, perhaps, she may not have been in a condition which allowed her to do so. Naturally, I could not mention that since it was a mere suspicion on my part."

"Naturally," he replied, and I could not tell whether there was veiled sarcasm in his tone.

However, I pretended to ignore it for I wished to learn something more.

"I am puzzled, Mr. Kenton, as to why Clara didn't have Raymond's law firm draw up her will."

"I can't answer that," he replied in his forthright manner. "I know only that she swore me to secrecy. You see, Miss Furnivall, your cousin did confess to me that she feared she was going to be murdered."

"I am beginning to believe now that she was," I said sadly.

"As do I. The only possible motive for her murder would be to get possession of the estate. Clara had already made Mrs. Furnivall her heir; therefore she is the most logical suspect."

"I cannot believe Lillian would be guilty of such a beastly act."

"It seems hardly likely. But she or her son could hire someone to commit that dastardly act. That would account for the mistaken attempt on your life."

"It would indeed!" I exclaimed. "But I find it so hard to believe."

"You know," Mr. Kenton said musingly, "if your cousin had let it be known that you were the heir, she would probably be alive today."

I thought again of the reference she had made to my seeing Timothy Kenton if anything happened to her so I told him about it.

"Did she not tell you to beware if anything happened to her?"

"Yes," I said, surprised at all this man knew.

"I wish you had come to me the morning after her murder."

"I wish I had," I said, feeling grossly remiss. "I also wish I had gone to the constable when the attempt was made on my life."

"Why did you not?"

"I already told you. Clara begged me not to. Also, Lillian suggested I obey Clara's wishes in the matter."

"Mrs. Furnivall again," he said significantly. "Miss Furnivall, I, too, fear you may be in grave danger of meeting the same fate your cousin did."

I shuddered and covered my face with my hands. He placed a comforting hand lightly on my shoulder.

"I dislike frightening you, but I think it would be wise for you to leave Cliffside."

"I couldn't do that," I protested and my eyes

pleaded with him for understanding. "It wouldn't be fair to Clara. She loved Cliffside, as did her father. Also, if I remain here, I may find a clue as to exactly what happened to my cousin."

"May I ask a personal question?"

"By all means."

"Were you in love with Mr. Hayes? By that, I mean," he appeared flustered, "did your cousin think you were?"

"No, but she thought Mrs. Furnivall was."

"Is that true?"

"I have no idea. I saw no evidence of it. Not really, I do believe Lillian is charmed by Raymond, but then, he is a gentleman with great charm."

"Oh," he said, eying me diffidently.

"You don't understand," I said huffily. "I am not the least bit romantically interested in Mr. Hayes. I have thought of him as only a friend and I shall continue to do so. He is a tremendously ambitious young man, too much so, in my opinion."

For the first time, he smiled. "I note a trace of spirit which I find admirable. May I add that your words please me?"

"In what way, sir?" I asked, still annoyed with this young man who had a way of easily disconcerting me.

"I shall probably make you more angry by telling you, yet I shall do so," he said. "I found you most appealing that day I was strolling the estate and caught a glimpse of you."

"You stalked me," I accused him indignantly.

Mr. Kenton threw back his head and laughed. "I

tried to, but you hid in order to force me into the open so you could catch a glimpse of me."

I could feel color flooding my face. Never before had I felt this way. This man definitely annoyed me in a disturbing way. I decided to put him in his place.

"I will tell you why I did so," I retorted. "Someone tried to kill or maim me by throwing a rock at me the day I arrived here. It was near that stone wall."

As quickly as it had appeared, his levity ceased. "And you didn't reveal that at the inquest?"

"No," I said nervously. "I didn't mention it to anyone at Cliffside because I really wanted to remain there. I had very little money, no position, and no training for one. Also, I loved my cousin very much and was eager to renew our acquaintance."

"My dear girl," he exclaimed. "You can't remain here."

"I can and I will," I said, looking up into his eyes which seemed as blue as the sky. "If Clara was murdered, I am going to attempt to find out who did it."

"And get murdered for your efforts?" he was astonished. For some reason the honest concern on his face pleased me.

"I shall exercise every precaution, Mr. Kenton," I said. "And I will appreciate it if you pay frequent visits to Cliffside. I will confess you do annoy me, yet I place great faith in your innate honesty. Truly, I need you."

"Thank you, Miss Furnivall—Nancy, if I may make so bold?" he ventured.

"You may—Tim," I replied, all my anger dispelled in the thought that I had a loyal friend. "That is

what Clara told me everyone in the village called you."

He smiled, arose, and extended his hand to assist me. I placed mine in his and, as he escorted me from the gazebo, I felt that nothing or no one at Cliffside could harm me.

ELEVEN

THAT EVENING Lillian sent word that she was afflicted with a severe headache, understandable under the circumstances, and that, consequently, she would not come downstairs. Neil had gone riding and had not returned, although it was now after dark. I sent word to Mrs. Donahue that I would be pleased if she would dine with me in the morning room.

She entered the room in her usual bustling manner, but I noticed that she had removed the large white-bibbed apron which she usually wore. At her neck was a lovely cameo pin which I admired.

"'Twas a gift from the first Mrs. Furnivall," Mrs. Donahue told me, with an appreciative smile that I had noticed it. "I value it highly, Miss Nancy."

"I can see that," I replied. "Do sit down, Mrs. Donahue. I felt the need for company and also I thought it would be an excellent time for me to tell you of my intentions regarding Cliffside."

"Thank you, ma'am," she said courteously. "The servants are waiting to hear. Nervously, I might add."

"Then you may set their minds at ease for I have no intention of making any changes."

"Bless you," she said, smiling. "All were hoping you'd come to that decision. There's none here who wishes to leave. Some have been at Cliffside many years and the more recent help have no less loyalty than the others for the old place and its new mistress."

"It pleases me to hear that," I told her.

She looked around her in a conspiratorial manner, then leaned forward. "And I don't mind telling you that all of us are very happy with the way things turned out."

"Even though the original will gave you a substantial sum?" I asked with a smile.

"The money doesn't matter, Miss. I've grown to love Cliffside and so have most of us. When I heard Mrs. Furnivall say she was going to get rid of it, I almost collapsed. It doesn't seem possible to me that anybody would want to be rid of a place like this."

"The house does not have the same meaning for Mrs. Furnivall because she has known it but a short time," I said. "And it may be an unhappy place for her."

"No place is unhappy, Miss. It's the people in it who are unhappy. And, speaking as a friend, Mrs. Furnivall should be looking out for that boy of hers. Pay more attention to him, than to getting rid of the place."

"Has her son been in trouble?" I asked.

"Nothing he couldn't handle—so far. But he rides to the village most every night—or he just disappears somewhere. No telling where he goes then. For a

young man, he drinks too much and gallivants too often."

"I'm afraid that's Mrs. Furnivall's problem," I said.

"It is sure enough. But she dotes on the lad and sees no harm nor evil in him. But I have heard from people who know that he loses large sums of money in gambling. Where he gets it, I do not know because, when he and his mama came here, they were poor as church mice. Leastwise, that's what I thought from their baggage and their clothes."

"Mrs. Donahue," I said, "I appreciate your telling me this, but I hope you will not repeat it to anyone else. And do not mention it to me again. Mrs. Furnivall and her son live here and I have invited her to continue to make this her home."

"Yes, ma'am," Mrs. Donahue said crisply.

I smiled. "I am not censuring you. It isn't as if you were telling tales out of school. You and I both know there has been a certain danger about these premises and there was a tragedy only a few days ago. We must be wide awake to whatever goes on so that nothing so ghastly can happen again."

"Pray heaven, it does not," she said piously.

I then purposely turned the talk to the intricacies of managing the household. Mrs. Donahue was more than adept and she informed me fully of the pertinent operations. I would learn, from Raymond, no doubt, about the expense of running such an abode as this.

When we had exhausted the subject of the household, I told her of my life in China for I wished to discourage further gossip. While I was still eager

to learn everything possible in regard to Lillian and Neil, as mistress of the household, there were certain rules which I must abide by.

Mrs. Donahue listened with evident interest and not once did she refer to the "heathens." I even spoke a little Chinese for her which amused her passingly well.

When we finished out meal, Mrs. Donahue excused herself. I walked slowly from the room, my mind's eye picturing once again the happy times I had had with my parents. While they were God-fearing people, nevertheless I had been raised to believe that life was to be lived and enjoyed for that was one of the reasons God had put us on this earth.

I thought of the day my father had been presented with the Buddha from the mandarin. My brow furrowed in puzzlement as I wondered how the idol of precious metal and jewels had turned to base metal and glass. Suddenly, I was curious to see this object once again and I made my way to Lillian's studio. As my hand touched the knob, I hesitated, wondering if I should enter.

But why should she object, I asked myself? After all, the Buddha was in there and it was my property. It was only natural that I would wish to see it, even though the sight of it had sorely grieved me when I first viewed it after my arrival. Now, however, it didn't seem to assume so much importance for I had small need of it financially.

I picked up a lamp which was on a table outside the studio door and entered. The room was so large that, once I was inside, it was necessary to light more lamps, which I promptly did. It was an eerie room

with its bulky figures, some of them muslin-covered. But, as I looked about me, I felt slightly sickened at all those statues and busts, for the room seemed to resemble a graveyard. I thought that Lillian, despite the time and energy she had expended on the ball, had found many spare hours to devote to her work for there were several new figures here. It was apparent she was dedicated to her sculpting.

The Buddha, once again covered, was on its little dais, just as before; it had not been moved. I set the lamp which I'd been carrying down and moved two more close to it so I would have sufficient light. Then I removed the cover from the statue and made a very careful examination.

So far as the likeness was concerned, the idol looked much as it had in China. But there it ended. Whereas before it had glittered with gold, now it was only the color of gold. The eyes which had been glittering precious stones were dull and flat. I could see that they were merely pieces of glass pasted into the sockets. I remembered well that the gems of the genuine one had been as carefully set as if they were in a piece of exquisite jewelry.

I keenly felt the loss of the original Buddha and tried to imagine how and when the priceless idol had been removed and this ugly duplicate put in its place. It could have been done aboard ship, but the thief would have had a difficult time getting the genuine idol through customs. Or, perhaps, it had been substituted in China while the original was being shipped to the dockside. Such thefts were not uncommon there. But, again, it was my belief that the mandarin's men would have accompanied it all the

way to the ship and they would have watched it being put aboard.

It did seem to me that the most logical place for the theft to have occurred was here in this house, right under the noses of Uncle Aaron and Lillian. That this could have been done by outsiders was difficult to believe, for few had known the Buddha existed. Papa had mentioned it in only one letter to Uncle Aaron. If someone talked about it outside of the house, then, perhaps, some greedy scoundrel had planned and carried out the substitution, yet even that seemed improbable. How could he know what it looked like to make the copy? And, certainly, Lillian would have recognized the substitution. So the theft and substitution had taken place before it arrived in the States.

The idol before me now was, of course, not so finely made as the real Buddha, but it was a good replica. Good enough so that Lillian believed she could get a modest price for it even though it was not a priceless object of art.

Nonetheless, the loss was dismaying to think about and I gave up trying to resolve just what had happened. I extinguished the lamps, with the exception of the one I would use to light my way out of the studio. It was with a feeling of relief that I walked toward the door for the lamp which I held seemed to send a wildly flickering light over the studio. I knew it was because I was so tense that my hand was shaking.

However, I forced myself to pause and take one last look around before I left the room. Somehow, my attention was attracted to a piece which was covered

and which, from the tools lying on a worktable alongside it, seemed to be the latest one Lillian was working on. Though I knew it was wrong, I went over to it, pulled the covering from it and a low moan escaped me.

The cover dropped from my hand and I backed away from the piece of statuary—it bore the face of Clara. It looked so real it seemed to be alive, especially with the flickering light of the oil lamp crossing its face. It was a perfect sculpting of the dead girl and I swallowed hard in an effort to maintain my self-control. I was fascinated by it, yet repelled and, at this moment, all I wanted to do was to get out of the studio.

I closed the door behind me, set the lamp on the table, and moved along the reception hall. How I longed for a human sound. If only someone would call out, or cough, or even close a door. Yet all was silence. The light from the chandeliers helped restore my courage and I decided that it would be wise for me to retire to my room. Mrs. Donahue had informed me that she always made sure that the house was locked up and all lights extinguished.

I went up the grand staircase, wishing mightily that I could take pleasure in knowing that I was now mistress of Cliffside, but I still felt too much grief over the loss of my cousin. I would, however, cherish everything in this house and continue to maintain it as a beauty spot. Mrs. Donahue would see to it that the furniture was kept polished and the upholstered pieces dusted daily. The grounds would be well-kept and improved wherever possible. I would consult

with Lillian and learn everything I could from her, for I was thinking of the future of Cliffside.

I was the sole survivor of the Furnivall family now. It was up to me to perpetuate the family, even though it would be under another name. My children would be of Furnivall blood, no matter what their surname. Cliffside Castle would be secure.

With this thought firmly fixed in mind, I entered my suite and regarded my reflection in the mirror. Once again, I was wearing mourning and I would continue to do so, for dear Clara.

I disrobed, stepped into my nightdress, and went directly to bed. It had been an exhausting day, beginning with the coroner's inquest, followed by the reading of the first will. Then came the surprising visit of Tim Kenton to Cliffside with the information that he was in possession of a later will which made me the sole heiress to the estate.

A smile touched my lips as I thought of Tim—his quiet manner, his muscular body, and lean face with the bluest eyes I had ever seen, topped with that red hair. But I sombered quickly as I recalled his concern for me. I hadn't thought once since Clara had died that there might be further danger for me. Yet Clara had warned me that if anything had happened to her, I should beware.

If Clara had been killed so that someone might obtain possession of Cliffside, then I was, indeed, in danger. A murderer was punished no more severely for one murder than for a dozen. He would have nothing to lose by committing another, provided he was clever enough not to get caught.

There was surely no comfort in these thoughts and I tried to push them out of my mind and seek the sleep which could give my body the rest it so sorely needed. I must have lain in bed for over an hour before I felt myself drifting off.

The sound was vague at first. Just some minor disturbance in the night, accounted for by the river breezes and the creaking of trees, or the scrape of a branch against a section of the house. But then the vagueness gave way to something more definite. What I heard were measured footsteps and they were in the corridor outside my rooms.

As I forced myself awake, I told myself there were a number of people in the house. If people walked instead of slept, it was their affair. I settled down, casting all ideas of peril out of my mind. But, when there was no surcease to the footsteps, my uneasiness grew. Up and down, they continued, just outside my door. Probably they couldn't be heard by anyone else in the house, but they were certainly meant for me to hear. Was this a beginning of terror that I, as the new mistress of Cliffside, was to know?

They were light steps, rather quick. Very much like—Clara! I gasped and sat up. Just like Clara! I fumbled on the bedside table for a match, got it lit, and then had trouble holding my hand steady enough to light the lamp. I fastened the chimney down in place, seized the lamp, and, without pausing for robe or slippers, made my way to the sitting room.

The sound had stopped. I opened the door, holding my breath as I did so. There was no one. My lamp illuminated much of the corridor, but there was no one visible. I closed the door and put my back

against it, for I was weak with the fear which had grown in me. After awhile, when my heartbeat resumed a normalcy, I reached down and turned the key in the lock. Then I made my way back to bed, but my body was still too tense to court sleep.

I sat on the edge of the bed, wondering if my imagination had been playing tricks on me. Yet I knew it hadn't. There had been someone walking in the corridor. Whoever it was had meant for me to hear the steps. I felt sure it had been a woman, but Lillian didn't walk that way. Her movements were slower, more graceful. These had been the quick, nervous steps so similar to those of Clara. Yet Clara was dead and I did not believe the dead returned.

I had been taught that in the religious part of my upbringing. There were no ghosts, but I did recall some Chinese peasants who listened as Papa assured them of this fact while they shivered merely at the mention of specters. That was the way I felt now. I didn't believe in them, but I would have greatly enjoyed some positive proof there were none abroad in Cliffside Castle.

It took some time for my nerves to quiet down and even then I had no desire to get into bed. I thought perhaps I might read, but there was no reading matter in my rooms and the prospect of going down to the library did seem attractive. Instead, I went to the dresser for a brush and I began a methodical, calm brushing of my hair. It was getting quite long. In China, I had cut it rather short due to the intense heat in the provinces where Papa traveled and treated his patients. Soon it would be as long as Clara's had been.

Always, my thoughts kept returning to the poor, dead girl. There was nothing unnatural in that, except that I didn't want to become morbid. It was a completely unnatural way for me to be, yet the sudden thought occurred to me that the statue of her in Lillian's studio had shocked me into believing that every sound I heard was her. I had to get a grip on myself.

I put the brush down, turned down the lamp, and got into bed. I was there not more than ten minutes when I heard the steps again. But now they were different; they were not in the corridor. They were heavy steps, like those of a man. I gripped the bedclothes tightly about me. Could it be the same person who had tried to throw me over the railing? Could it be that he had returned and murdered Clara? And was now set on doing the same to me?

Terror flooded through me and I opened my mouth to shout for help. Then, as quickly, I clapped my hand over it to still the cry that never came. Suppose I were imagining these sounds, or suppose I did cry out and when help came, there was no one on the balcony? What then? Would they not think me silly or foolish?

I thought of Papa who, in his meanderings through China, never knew fear. He had worked against great odds for little or no income and, regardless of how hostile the war lords were, he never hesitated to go to the most remote provinces to carry out his work. He was never afraid. Both he and my mother had shown great courage, right up to the courageous ends of their lives. Why, I asked myself, should I be so cowardly and frightened of sounds that

were probably part of the night? Or of footsteps made by a human being? And why not investigate them? If there were an intruder, surely a light would rout him.

I lit the lamp again. This time, I put on my dressing gown and slippers. Then I opened the French doors and moved quietly onto the balcony. It was again a pitch-dark night, but no shadows moved, and there was no one within range of the lamplight. Then I realized there was another light—where there should be none. A light from the windows of Clara's room.

I remained rooted to the spot where I stood. No one was supposed to be in her room. I could think of no one who would want to be. Yet the light of at least one candle was plainly evident.

Again, I told myself I must not be afraid; that there was some logical explanation to this. But, to allay my fears, I had to investigate. So I moved toward the doors as softly as possible. I wanted to peer inside before letting my presence be known. I reached a point within ten feet of the doors when the light went out. I was stunned and I came to a stop once more. Whether I was cowardly or not, no force on earth could have compelled me to take another step.

Now I was beset by terror such as I had never known. I no longer wanted to see who was in that room. I backed away from it slowly, tempted to blow out my own lamp so that my presence would not be visible to whoever was in there, but I needed the comfort it gave me. At least, if anyone came out of those French doors and approached me with evil in-

tent, I would be able to discern who it was. Also, the lamp gave me a weapon of sorts.

I had almost reached my doors when I heard the sound of an approaching rider. My heart increased its pounding until I thought of Neil and I felt a blessed relief.

I held my lamp high and moved it back and forth in the hope of attracting his attention. Apparently, it did for I heard his horse come to a stop and then start again, this time at a full gallop in the direction of the balcony.

I moved over to the railing and looked down as Neil reined in his horse.

"What is it, Nancy?"

"Please stay there," I pleaded. "I'll be down directly."

He dismounted, slapped the flank of the animal and it trotted off in the direction of the stables.

I hastened through my rooms and moved briskly along the corridor, still holding onto my precious lamp, my beacon of safety. I was fearful of every shadow and wanted to escape this house, even if only for a few minutes. However, I moved cautiously down the steps for I was trembling so, I didn't want to risk a misstep and end in a fall.

My lamp threw a thousand weird shadows and the sound of my heels on the polished wood of the stairway seemed like the booming of cannon fire as it reverberated through the silent house. At least, I reached the front door and opened it. It was with a feeling of vast relief that I saw Neil awaiting me at the foot of the porch steps.

"What is troubling you, Nancy?" he asked as I reached his side.

"Did you see anyone?" I asked, my voice shaking with near hysteria.

"Who? See who? When?"

"As you rode up," I said impatiently. "Someone has been prowling about."

"I saw no one but you, Nancy, waving the lamp to attract my attention."

"Oh, Neil, someone has been prowling about. Both in the house and on the balcony."

"Are you certain?"

"Pray believe me, I am. Someone walked up and down in the corridor outside my room. I thought it was a woman. The steps sounded like one—fast and light. Then I heard the steps of a man striding back and forth across the balcony. I was terrified, but I got up, lit my lamp, and went out to investigate."

"Was there someone there?"

"No. But there was a light in poor Clara's room."

The lamplight reflected his puzzled features. "But who would go in there? Unless Mama had some reason to——"

"I hope it was she," I said fervently. "I—I just don't understand what is going on here, Neil."

He shrugged. "It's the house, Nancy. It's evil. I hated it from the moment I came here. I'm sorry about what happened to Clara, but, after her death, I was hoping Mama would see fit to leave this place and open a studio in New York City."

I could well imagine that he would prefer the exciting life of the city to the staid life at Cliffside, but

I was not concerned with that at the moment, nor did I like his deprecatory reference to the house.

"It is not an evil house, but a pleasant one, a beautiful one, and you know it. True, now it is a house where there has been a tragic death, a mysterious death, but——"

"What is mysterious about suicide except the workings of a sick mind which resorts to it?" he asked, his tone almost indifferent.

"What indeed," I replied. "If it was suicide."

"You question it when a verdict has already been rendered to that effect?" Neil sounded and looked a little impatient with me.

"Remember, Neil, I did not tell my story at the inquest about the night that I was almost murdered."

"I believe that was someone who wandered onto the estate. A maniac, true—but he was frightened off."

"Only to return tonight," I stated with a sternness that surprised me.

"If you are so frightened, why don't you leave Cliffside?" he asked brusquely.

"To do such a thing would be cowardly and ungrateful. Rather, I intend to seek out whoever is attempting to frighten me. For I believe these frights are deliberate."

"Just who, in heaven's name, is there to do that? Surely not my mother. I have only just arrived from the village. If you do not believe me——"

"Of course, I believe you. And I'm grateful for your assistance. I was terribly frightened."

"You could have gone to my mother. She would have kept you company."

"She did not come down to dine tonight. She is troubled with a headache and I saw fit not to disturb her. Besides, I was so relieved to hear you arriving on horseback, I wanted to get out of the house and come down here to join you. I needed to be with someone."

Neil's smile was apologetic and he reached out a hand to touch my arm lightly in a reassuring gesture.

"Forgive me, Nancy. I didn't mean to be disagreeable. You're upset, and rightly so. I shall take a look around, but I suggest you go inside. You might take a chill."

"No, I'll look with you," I said. "And forgive my ire. Truly, I am upset, but I do feel relief now that you are here. I felt so alone and so frightened in the house. That is why I cannot return to it until you tell me all is well."

Neil began to search the area near the house and I followed him, careful not to get in his way, but seeing to it that I remained in sight of him because the disquietude I had felt in my suite had not left me.

"There is no evidence around here and I see no signs near the balcony of bootprints," he said, turning to me. "When we go inside, I'll investigate Clara's suite. But, now, I insist you come into the house for you are shivering."

"It isn't from cold, I assure you," I said, "but rather from vague apprehensions which will not leave me."

"Come inside and I will give you a little brandy to calm you," Neil said comfortingly. "And I will waken Mama who will remain with you the night."

His words sent a strange chill through me for I re-

called how, only a few short nights ago, I had done the same for Clara. And now she was dead. Could the same cruel fate be in store for me?

I could not remain outside any longer. I was cold. Whether it was the chill of fear or that of the night, I knew not. But I sensed it would be wise for me to re-enter the asylum of the house.

I was walking beneath the balcony and approaching the place where Clara had fallen and died. I glanced at the spot and gave a shudder as I remembered her white-clad form lying there with her neck awry.

Then I saw something glistening on the red-brick pavement. The lamplight picked it out. I bent down. It was a wet smear of some kind, almost a small pool of dark liquid. I touched the surface of it with my fingertip, brought the light closer, and then I arose slowly and began calling Neil in a loud, high-pitched, terror-filled voice.

I stood, like one hypnotized, staring at my fingertips which were smeared with fresh blood. For that is what the pool consisted of—fresh blood! At the exact spot where Clara had fallen! I began to feel dizzy and faint as a sudden weakness overcame me. I did manage to bend down and rub my fingers against the dew-laden grass just off the brick pavement in an effort to wipe away the blood. Then, as I began to straighten up, I saw it again and it was too much. I felt myself going down on my knees. The lamp dropped from my hand and went out as I fell over sideways in a deep faint.

TWELVE

I AWOKE on the sofa in the formal parlor, with Lillian and Mrs. Donahue hovering anxiously over me. I pushed away the vial of smelling salts with which Lillian had revived me, and I tried to sit up. So far, my mind had not yet oriented itself to the circumstances, and I was only puzzled as to what had happened to me.

Then my awareness returned and I brought my hand before my eyes to see if the blood still remained. There was no sign of it. I sat there, staring at my fingertips until I realized I must be acting in a most peculiar manner.

"It's all right now, dear," Lillian said. "Nothing's going to harm you."

"How—did I get here?" I asked.

"Neil carried you in. He's outside now, searching the grounds. He said you had heard someone."

"Heard someone?" I cried out. "Lillian, did you go into Clara's room tonight—not long ago?"

"Why—no. I would have no reason to go in there."

"Did you, Mrs. Donahue?"

"No, Miss Nancy. I locked the house and put out all the lamps after you went upstairs."

I looked at her with surprise. "How did you know when I went upstairs? I saw no sign of anyone before I retired."

"I caught a glimpse of you," Mrs. Donahue said matter-of-factly. "It's me duty to keep me eyes open, Miss Nancy. After all, 'tis the responsibility of the housekeeper to know what goes on."

"Of course, Mrs. Donahue," I replied. "Forgive me, I am quite overwrought. I heard footsteps outside my door earlier tonight, yet when I went out to investigate, I could see no one, though I am certain they were those of a woman." I made no mention of them reminding me of Clara. "Later, I heard footsteps on the balcony, pacing back and forth—and they were those of a man. I was frightened, but determined to investigate. Yet when I went out, I could see no one. But there was a light in my cousin's room. Someone was there."

"I'm sure none of the servants would invade the privacy of Miss Clara's suite for any reason what soever," Mrs. Donahue said.

I nodded. "Then Neil came and I attracted his attention with the lamp. I went outside and joined him, telling him what I'd heard, and also about the light in Clara's room. He could find no trace of anyone. Then—as I was returning to the house, I looked at the place where dear Clara fell to her death and I saw a large stain of blood." I shuddered.

"Blood!" Lillian gasped. "But—who was hurt ——?"

"I don't know. Possibly no one."

"My dear," Lillian rested a comforting hand on my arm, "what are you trying to say? Or did you have a nightmare?"

"No, no, no," I cried. "I saw it, I tell you! I saw it!"

"But when Clara fell, there was no blood."

"I know."

"Oh, my dear," Lillian said, "you are trembling."

"Yes, because I'm frightened," I cried. "I believe someone is trying to scare me. I believe someone wishes me to leave Cliffside."

"But who? Surely you don't think——"

"No," I exclaimed. "I do not believe you and Neil would do such a thing. Nor you, Mrs. Donahue," I added, seeing the look of concern on that good woman's face.

Lillian asked, "Are you afraid to remain here for a few minutes while Mrs. Donahue and I go out and investigate this blood you say you saw?"

"You needn't be afraid, Miss Nancy," Mrs. Donahue said. "I've roused the servants and they're searching the house to see if anyone is about who has no business here."

I told them I felt quite safe, as indeed I did, for the light of several lamps lent a cheeriness to the surroundings which I was far from feeling. I wanted to accompany the others on the search, but I felt too weak. Instead, I sat up and sought to control my swimming brain. Soon I heard them coming back. I looked up, expecting to see the same horror reflected on their faces that I had felt. Instead, they regarded me pityingly.

Lillian sat down beside me. "Nancy dear, we found no signs of any blood. None whatsoever, and Neil made no mention of it when he discovered you in a faint and brought you inside."

"It's true, Miss Nancy," Mrs. Donahue added. "There is no blood."

I fought back the tears. "I know there was fresh blood. My fingers were stained with it. I don't know what's going on, but I fear unless I find out soon, I shall lose my mind."

"Perhaps you were fast asleep and dreamed these things," Lillian offered hopefully. "It's natural for you to be dwelling on Clara's shocking death. It still has me upset. Remember, I was married to her father and I felt a responsibility toward the girl despite her dislike for me."

"This was not a dream. I was wide awake. Neil was with me but a moment before I found the blood. I tell you it was there. I saw it. I touched it. My finger was wet with it."

"In daylight, we may find some trace of it," Lillian said soothingly. "Right now, I feel it would be wise for you to get some rest, Nancy. I shall stay with you the remainder of the night. In that way, you might have tranquil sleep. If, instead, you wish to talk, I'll be there to listen."

"How kind you are," I said gratefully. "But I would not think of inconveniencing you, particularly since you have been troubled with a headache."

"My head is much better now and of no consequence," Lillian said, shrugging it off. "Please allow me to do for you what Clara would not. I am an older woman, and if I can ease your fears and make

you comfortable, it will help me to feel worth while."

"In that case, I would appreciate it if you would accompany me upstairs," I said. "I still feel some of the fright and it has left me weak."

"Thank you, my dear, for granting me the privilege of being of assistance to you," Lillian said.

"It is I who should extend my thanks and offer my apologies for disturbing the quiet of the household."

"I talked with the servants before I came in here," Mrs. Donahue said, her eyes brimming with sympathy for me, "and they have not found a thing out of order nor a trace of anyone in the house or on the grounds."

"Thank you, Mrs. Donahue. You may go now and tell the servants they may return to their rest. I hope and pray I shall not disturb them again this night."

"I'll say a prayer that you'll get your sleep and have no more frights," Mrs. Donahue said kindly. "Good night, Miss Nancy."

She left the room and I arose slowly and steadied myself. I refused Lillian's offer of aid and she and I walked slowly from the room. Mrs. Donahue set about the task of extinguishing the lamps.

When we reached my suite, I noticed Lillian locked the door after she closed it and I realized my story had made some impression on her. She also lit all the lamps and candles. I did not wish to retire yet so I settled myself in a large upholstered chair. Lillian eased herself into a chair opposite me with a soft sigh.

"My dear, are you sure it is wise for you to remain in this house? I feel now that Cliffside Castle is not a

fit place to live—certainly not for a young girl, particularly so soon after the tragedy of Clara's frightening death."

"I agree, Lillian, that there are evil forces at work here. In fact, I am convinced of it, but they have nothing to do with the house. I will admit I am frightened, but I believe there is someone who is deliberately trying to fill me with terror in the hope that I will flee. But I will not."

"I commend you for your courage," she said, glancing at me admiringly. "And I want you to know I will remain with you as long as you wish. I feel I should—at least until we have traced the source of whatever is troubling you."

"Pray accept my gratitude for your thoughtfulness. Perhaps I should take up water-color painting or work of some sort that would keep my mind occupied."

"An excellent idea," Lillian agreed. "I would be quite lonely without my sculpting."

"I was in your studio tonight," I said, remembering my visit. "I don't know how you find the time to accomplish all you do. I noticed you are working on a head of Clara."

She looked surprised. "How did you know? Oh," she smiled knowingly, "you removed the cover."

"I hope you don't mind," I said.

"Not at all," she replied. "Poor Clara. I always liked her, and I had hoped I could replace the mother she had lost, yet she would have none of it. But I am grieving for her—almost as if she were my own for, you see, I loved her father."

"Clara has no grave over which the monument could stand," I mused.

"That's why it will be only a bust when it is finished. I shall provide a pedestal for it and place it inside the mausoleum before her crypt. It is the last gesture I can make as proof of the tender feeling I held for the girl."

"It is good of you to do so," I replied. "However, I visted the studio, not to prowl, but to look again on the imitation Buddha. It is so obviously a replica that I wonder how anyone was ever fooled by it."

"But no one was," Lillian said. "It arrived sealed in a crate. Neil opened it for me and we dragged it out, it was so heavy. I saw at once that it was certainly not what Aaron had expected from your father, but I refrained from saying anything about it for several days, until I could make a thorough examination and be sure."

"What did Uncle Aaron say when you told him?"

"He was astounded. He said your father was hardly the kind of man who would have been taken in by such a blatant forgery, and he believed a substitution must have been made somewhere during the shipment to America."

"Then it could not have been stolen after it arrived here?"

Lillian smiled. "I know what you're thinking, my dear, and I don't blame you. I am a sculptor. It would be quite simple for me to create a forgery and pass it off on Aaron. Yes, I could have done that, though I must say that if I had, the forgery would have been a far better piece of work than the mon-

strosity that sits in my studio now. That false statue, in my opinion, was very hastily made out of inferior materials."

"Then, of course, it must have been done en route," I said hopelessly.

"I'm happy that it does not matter any more. Now, you are a very wealthy young woman. Let me assure you, Nancy, that I am not in the least resentful that I lost the inheritance. In fact, it constantly amazed me to think that Clara, with all the hatred she bore me, had left everything to me. I'm not a Furnivall by blood and you are. Cliffside Castle belongs in the family and everything is as it should be. I am by no means in want. My profession pays well and I am quite successful at it."

"Whatever happened to Cliffside in title, Lillian, never did make any difference to either of us. When you believed it was yours, you were most gracious."

"If only poor Clara had been more like you, this bleak old place would have rung to the rafters with laughter and gaiety. Perhaps now it will."

I wondered how in the world it could, with this strange, mysterious malevolence threatening me. I still felt shaken from my ordeal, and I was genuinely puzzled at the disappearance of the blood from the place I had seen it. For see it, I had. Touch it, I had. Yet my fingers had been cleansed of it. I'd looked to see that if, by accident, I had smeared it on my dressing gown, but there were no traces of any stain.

"I doubt there will be much laughter and gaiety for awhile, for I shall mourn my cousin for the proper period. After that, we shall see." I paused and my brow furrowed thoughtfully. "I would like to go

to Clara's rooms. I would like to see for myself if there is any sign of an intruder having been there."

"We shall do so at once," Lillian said, rising and picking up a lamp.

I arose and reached for another. She had the door unlocked and opened by the time I approached it. The corridor was already in darkness—evidence that Mrs. Donahue had already retired. But Neil was still, apparently, outside.

Lillian and I walked down the corridor and entered the darkened suite of my dead cousin. There, we lit more lamps. Then carefully searched the premises without finding any clue that anyone had been there. The candles in the candalabras had never been lit, the lamp chimneys were cold. I knew they would be, but I felt of them anyway before the flame of a match was touched to their wicks.

The bed was made. Clara's possessions in the closets were undisturbed, just as if she expected to return momentarily from a brief journey. The French doors were fastened on the inside so no one had either entered or escaped through them.

"If there had been a moon," Lillian said, "I would surmise that you saw a reflection of its light; it is so often deceiving, but—there was no moon."

"I saw light in this room, I heard footsteps in the corridor, more footsteps on the balcony, and I saw and touched blood on the red bricks below the balcony where Clara fell. I am not given to wild fantasying, Lillian. I am not a child beset by dreams. The things I have told you about were real."

"Then we shall surely find an explanation for them," she said. "Come—let us go back. My dear,

you do need rest. You have been upset so badly——"

I made up my mind not to begin relying on someone else now. Lillian meant well and I did appreciate her thoughtfulness, but I wanted to face up to my predicament alone.

"I will return to my rooms, Lillian. There is no need for you to lose more sleep. I'm not a child and I'm determined not to let this upset me."

"But it is not an inconvenience—and I am concerned for you."

"No, Lillian. As you say, all of this must have some explanation, and I cannot continue to live in an aura of constant fear."

I started extinguishing the lamps; that action alone served to calm me.

Lillian held the door open for me. "You are very wise and very brave, my dear. Comfort yourself with the knowledge that there will be someone close by."

We were nearing my suite when we heard Neil coming up the stairs. He was carrying a lamp and stamping noisily in his riding boots as we went to meet him.

"I have searched the estate as thoroughly as I could," he reported. "I found no trace of anyone. I heard nothing and saw nothing unusual."

"Neil, when you found me in a faint, did you notice anything on the red brick pavement close by me?"

He shook his head. "No. I didn't look, but if there'd been anything of an extraordinary nature, I'm sure it would have attracted my attention. How-

ever, the lamp went out when it fell from your hand and it was dark——"

"It was while I was carrying the lamp that I saw a small pool of blood," I told him. "My eyes were drawn down to the spot where poor Clara lay when we found her. The lamplight reflected something and, when I bent to see what it was, it appeared to be blood. I even touched it with my fingertip and examined it closely. I know it was blood. I attempted to wipe it off on the dew-soaked grass. But the recognition of it was what caused me to faint."

"I saw no blood."

"Not even on my fingers?"

"Nancy, I didn't look at your hands. My sole concern was to bring you into the house where you could recover from your swoon. As for the blood—where could it have come from—unless you cut yourself."

"I did not," I assured him. "But I know I saw a small puddle of blood there."

Neil regarded me with puzzlement, then his glance shifted to his mother.

Lillian said, "Mrs. Donahue and I went outside and looked for the blood, but we couldn't find a trace."

"Perhaps I had better remain below the balcony tonight," he said. "It will give Nancy reassurance."

"Pray do not do that," I exclaimed. "Truly, I am sorely bewildered because what I saw was not visible to anyone else, but I swear I saw it."

"I still say I——" Neil began.

I raised a hand in protest. "No. I do thank you for the offer, but I am so exhausted I believe I will

sleep. As for the blood, I shall do my best to forget about it."

"Good night, Nancy," Lillian said soberly. "If you awaken in a fright, please come to me."

"Be assured that I shall," I promised. I smiled a good night to Neil, went into my parlor, closed, and locked the door. I passed through my rooms and checked the French doors to make certain they were fastened.

Then I removed my dressing gown and examined the hem of it carefully. There wasn't a trace of blood, though there were bits of grass and earth on it, the result of my faint. In like fashion, I checked the hem of my nightdress, but it, too, was free of stains.

I examined my hands again, even going so far as to check beneath my fingernails to see if I could find even the slightest fleck of blood. But my minute examination revealed nothing.

I went about my suite extinguishing lamps and snuffing out candles. Then I returned to my bedroom, put out the last lamp, and got into bed. There, I stretched out in an attempt to relax my weary limbs. I felt a muscular soreness throughout my body —partly the result of my muscles tensing from fright and partly from my fall when I fainted.

Regardless of what I had said to Lillian and Neil, I was thoroughly frightened. I was so alone. I had not a living relative—no one to advise me. I wondered if I should leave Cliffside. It was too sequestered here for a young girl. I got along well with Lillian, but I doubted she would remain here for long, particularly after what Neil had said tonight. Nor

did I blame her. She was still young and extremely attractive, and Neil, though a wastrel, couldn't be blamed for wanting to be where there was more life.

I felt a great sense of relief that he had been sober when he returned. I was appreciative of what he had done to ease my fears and it had been with a vast sense of comfort that I had heard him gallop up the drive on the way to the stables when I needed help.

Again, the thought of leaving Cliffside recurred to me; and, again, I rejected it. How could I go when Clara had made me her sole heir? She loved Cliffside. She wasn't happy here, but that was because she had felt such antagonism for Lillian and her son. Yet she hadn't ordered them off the property and she could have done so. I felt that that was in Clara's favor, though I had to admit she hadn't made their life particularly serene.

If only there was someone I could talk to. And then, suddenly, a lean face with a lazy sort of smile and blue eyes which could appear either serious or amused, came to mind. Tim Kenton. Of course. He had told me that, should I need any help or advice, I could come to him. Even he hadn't wanted me to remain at Cliffside Castle yet I was determined to do so. Come the morning, I would pay him a visit. I could see nothing wrong with retaining him for my legal requirements. He lived in the village and it was far more convenient than having to take a train to New York City, where I didn't know my way around for legal matters. I could probably make use of two attorneys. I might well have need of them.

But at present, I needed only Tim Kenton. I

would drive to the village in the morning to talk with him. Once I had made up my mind to that, a calmness seemed to flow through me. Gradually, I began to feel weariness descend over me. I closed my eyes and quickly sank into a deep, untroubled sleep—one which would refresh and enliven me for the new day.

THIRTEEN

I HAD a lesson in learning how it felt to be the owner of Cliffside the next morning when I asked the hostler to supply me with a carriage so that I might drive to the village. In a few moments he had a well-curried, sleek black horse harnessed and ready. He helped me onto the seat and gave me a little practical advice on handling this particular animal. I did remember how to drive a carriage and I was soon on my way to the village.

I had dressed with meticulous care, even though I was wearing mourning garb. But I wore my hair with a short fringe across the brow and coiled in back at the nape of my neck. How glad I was that it was growing longer, for I felt it gave me dignity to wear it in this formal, yet flattering, fashion.

As I drove down the single Main Street, I realized the village had changed very little since I was a child, but, upon reflection, I realized that that was not too long ago as I was now only nineteen. Perhaps it was all the dire events of the past few months which made the time seem like an eternity.

The neat white houses with their front-yard flower gardens and white fences and gates were still there. The Commercial House looked completely unchanged, and the men rocking in the sunlight on the front porch seemed to be the same individuals. The small bakery run by the widow—I'd forgotten her name—had the same kinds of pies and breads in the window. The general store looked a little bigger, but I paid scant attention to any improvement here because my eyes lifted to the windows of an office above the store, on which was lettered:

TIMOTHY KENTON
LAWYER

I pulled up the carriage and dropped the weight to keep the horse standing quietly. I had picked a shady place for him and he promptly closed his eyes and, I suppose, fell asleep.

I knew that every eye was on me and that little boys and girls had been sent running from house to house to pass the word that I was driving in. Now and then, I could see the corner of a lace curtain pulled aside. Business in the general store was suspended. A small boy's nose was pressed out of shape against one window as I passed by.

I climbed the outside stairs to Tim's office and, at the top, a sign requested me to walk in. I did so and found myself in a small waiting room. It was furnished with four hard chairs and a rather ancient sofa which was, nevertheless, very clean. There was a braided rug on the floor and two lamps with red shades sat on tables. Below them were copies of magazines, mostly farm journals. The door to the

private office was closed, but, as I prepared to sit down, it opened and Tim appeared. There was a smile of welcome on his face as he walked over to me.

"Good morning, Nancy. I am honored."

I returned the smile as I said, "You seem to have expected me, yet I sent no word that I was coming."

"Well, I'll tell you," Tim said, folding his arms before him as he regarded me quizzically, "a buzz started up about the time you reached the outskirts and I said to myself—a buzzing like that means only one thing—sure enough, I looked out and there you were, pretty as a picture, driving your carriage down the street."

I felt color flame through my face at his broad compliment, and I found again that this man had a way of making me feel uneasy, even though I had sought out his company. For that very reason, I decided to attend to business. I had no time for idle, foolish thoughts, for, after last night, I needed someone whose judgment I could trust and this tall, red-haired, gentle man standing before me, seemed the only person who could give me the help I needed.

"Thank you for the compliment, Tim, but I have come here to seek advice."

His face sobered. "Then it is not a social call?"

"I have come here as a friend, for that is what I consider you."

"Thank you, kind miss." Tim took my elbow and waved his other arm in the direction of the office. "Let us go in there where we will have more privacy, should another client enter, or, mayhap, someone from town who is overcurious to get a good look at you."

I smiled and entered his inner office. He held a chair for me. Then he took his place behind the oak desk. I had a chance to observe his unadorned office. It seemed to me that it consisted mainly of law books, though there was a framed tintype of two people whom I presumed to be his father and mother. It was easy to see he favored his mother.

"And now, Nancy, suppose you tell me what is troubling you."

"I hope you won't think me foolish," I began, then hesitated.

Tim leaned forward and his hand rested lightly over my hands which were folded in my lap. "I will never think you foolish. I want to help you. I can see, though you are feigning calmness, you are under a strain."

"Oh, Tim, I am!" I exclaimed. "I had another fright last night. To me, it was most unnerving, yet I could not convince Lillian, or Neil, or even Mrs. Donahue, of the extraordinary things I had heard and seen."

"Tell me about it."

So I described for Tim the sounds of the footsteps, the light in Clara's room, and the pool of blood I had discovered. I could see his face grow more grave as I spoke. I couldn't help but feel a slight uneasiness because I wondered how I could expect him to believe me when neither Lillian, nor Neil, nor Mrs. Donahue had.

"Let us consider these incidents one by one," Tim suggested. "First of all, the footsteps—light ones in the corridor, heavy ones on the balcony. Obviously,

there were two people. Did they make any attempt to gain entry to your rooms?"

"None whatsoever," I replied. "I believe both times—those of the woman occurred earlier in the evening—it was done to frighten me. However, when I heard the heavy tread of steps on the balcony, I forced myself to light the lamp and go out onto the balcony to investigate. That is when I saw the light in Clara's room."

"Obviously, then, the person on the balcony had access to the house. He stepped out on the balcony from Clara's room."

"Her doors were closed," I said.

"And, no doubt, fastened," Tim said. "For you had given evidence of your courage by going out there. The lighted lamp gave you away and allowed the intruder time to get out of Clara's suite. And, perhaps, out of the house."

"It undoubtedly did because the servants searched the house for signs of an interloper but found nothing. That was Mrs. Donahue's doing and I am thankful to her for that."

"Could it not have been Neil?"

"It could not," I replied, "for just as I was about to re-enter my room, he came galloping up the drive. I signaled him with the lamp and he drew up his horse beneath the balcony. I told him I wished to join him outside. I felt I had to be with somebody. I was afraid to stay alone. Lillian had not appeared for our evening meal; she pleaded a headache."

"Quite understandable under the circumstances," Tim commented. "She had just been done out of quite a sizable legacy."

"In any case, I could not disturb her," I went on. "As for the light footsteps, I must confess I thought of Clara. It was stupid of me, but she had a nervous, hurried way of walking."

"You were, no doubt, meant to think that, so feel no embarrassment or fear because of it."

"Thank you, Tim. You are helping me restore confidence in myself."

"Now, about the pool of blood," he said. "That, I must confess, puzzles me particularly since, as I recall, Clara's death did not produce any blood. Her neck was broken."

I nodded agreement.

"Then what was it doing there? To symbolize Clara's death? Undoubtedly, even though she had shed no blood. Therefore, I believe it was done for the sole purpose of frightening you."

"It would seem so."

"The question is, who put it there?"

"That is what tortures me. Who is doing this? Why am I being frightened? For someone to get Cliffside? But who—other than Lillian and Neil? And, surely, she took the change in wills in good grace though it was a shock to her."

Tim's brow furrowed in thought. "Neil was down there alone for awhile until you reached him?"

"Yes."

"He could have arranged it and he could also have cleaned it up after he brought you in the house. He was in the best position to do that so we must consider him a suspect."

I shook my head. "It is so difficult for me to believe——"

"We're not believing or accusing at present, Nancy."

I nodded understandingly and bit at my lower lip. "I am remindful of what my dear cousin said to me. It was in the form of a warning—that, if anything happened to her, I was to beware, for I might be next."

The palm of his hand came down on the desk with considerable force. "We will see to it that such a thing never happens. You see, young lady, though you don't remember me, I have known you and carried a picture of you in my mind since you were a child and came here to visit."

My eyes widened in wonderment.

"Oh yes," Tim said and the merest trace of a smile touched his lips. "I was quite smitten with you. I used to wander around the Furnivall estate. Aaron was very kind to me. He and my father were great friends. In fact, it was Aaron who gave me my first important case. It was a great help to me—as he knew it would be."

"I'm certain you wouldn't have gotten it, had he felt you not competent to handle it," I replied, feeling a warm glow as his eyes regarded me admiringly.

It was Tim's turn to blush. "I won," was his simple answer. "But now—back to the blood. You say no one else saw it."

"No one. Lillian and Mrs. Donahue both went outside to look."

"But you did see it?"

"I swear it. I also touched it and wiped my fingers on the grass to cleanse them of it. That was when I

dropped the lamp as I fainted. I do hope you believe me."

"Every word, Nancy. You know, of course, the two most logical people to suspect of trying to harass you are Lillian and her son."

"I know," I agreed. "But I cannot believe it. Lillian has already begun work on a head of Clara to be placed in the mausoleum. I think that is a touching gesture."

"I will withhold an opinion on that also," Tim replied. "I haven't forgotten in what a state of fear Clara came to me."

I colored guiltily. "Oh, Tim, what must you think of me! I know Clara was frightened that night someone attempted to throw me off the balcony. Yet, afterward, she seemed to lose her fear."

"It was the day following that episode that she came to me to make a new will," Tim revealed. "She was in abject fear. I wanted her to go to the constable, but she refused."

"I pleaded with her also to allow me to go to him, but she declined for she feared she might be thought fanciful. I now fear the same thing, yet I swear all of these things which I have related to you happened."

"I'm fully aware of it."

"I suppose," I reasoned, "the reason I feel no hostility toward Lillian is because Clara bore such hatred toward her and her son."

He nodded. "It is a pity she would not accept them. But she was an exceedingly possessive creature, and I believe her heart was broken when her father remarried for he no longer gave her the attention he

formerly did even though he loved her just as much as before."

"We must also remember that he taught her hatred," I said.

"How do you mean?"

"I am referring to the Seatons. When I mentioned inviting them to the ball, she told me if Mr. Seaton set foot on the property, she would shoot him. If his sister did, she said she would use a whip on her."

"She probably would have," Tim replied. "I'm pleased that you have none of that hatefulness stored up in you. But, then, your upbringing was quite different."

"Quite," I said, smiling. "It was mostly a case of doing without. That is why such opulence being thrust upon me so suddenly has left me rather stunned. Also, I am beginning to wish Clara hadn't been so generous, for I feel that I would not be subjected to such persecution were I as penniless as when I set foot on Cliffside. However, I have been attacked anyway." I paused, then added curiously, "Will you tell me, please, why this great enmity between the Seatons and the Furnivalls?"

"It's very simple. Many years ago, the Seatons were Dutch patroons. They were very wealthy, and they owned the whole mountain around here, much of this town, and Cliffside Castle, of course, did not exist. But mismanagement or bad crops, or the fact that their workers left them—perhaps any or all of those factors—resulted in a decided slip in the Seaton fortunes so that they were compelled to sell much of the land."

"But do they not now own a goodly portion and a great house as well?"

"Oh yes—but it's not a place like Cliffside, nor does it have a fraction of your acreage. Seaton and his sister have done quite well through investments and are not poor by any means. But they claimed that some of the land your Uncle Aaron paid taxes on was theirs. Aaron disputed the claim and I—luckily—won the case for Aaron. As I told you—my first big one. Since then—that was five or six years ago—there's been no love lost. When Arthur Seaton refused to accept the decision of the court and he continued riding and hunting on the land he said was his, Aaron built that brick wall. Seaton's hatred grew, and Aaron's stubbornness got stronger. When Aaron died, Clara carried on the feud."

"What a pity they couldn't resolve their differences peaceably."

"I agree. However, the trial was especially bitter, and Aaron was not one to forget or forgive. As for Seaton, he can be obnoxious when he chooses to be. His sister, of course, is a gentle soul—at least, on the surface." Tim smiled enigmatically.

"What do you mean?"

"She is very proud, a haughty individual; she has rather a time keeping servants so demanding is she."

"Ah—village gossip," I said understandingly.

"Village gossip," he replied. "Most of it isn't worth the breath it takes to repeat it, but once in awhile one picks up some information of value. Also, Virginia does love to play the queen and would do so, if given half a chance."

"Strange, I didn't get that impression," I said, my mind's eye recalling her meek little figure.

"She's deceptive."

"Arthur makes no bones about what he wants. You know, I believe he would have attempted to buy Cliffside Castle from Lillian if she had inherited."

I frowned. "Did you not know that Lillian intended to sell it?"

"Such news doesn't surprise me. Lillian really isn't resourceful enough to remain cloistered up there on that estate. Nor is her son."

"Neil seems to be champing at the bit to get away ever since Clara's death. He told me he had hoped his mother would leave."

"I think he will get his wish. As for you, what will you do at Cliffside by yourself?"

"I don't know really," I said. "I will tell you in confidence I am quite overwhelmed by being the mistress of Cliffside. Also, a little frightened."

"That's understandable," he said. Then he added, meaningfully, "After a proper period of mourning, I'm sure you will enter into society and you will be immensely popular. You couldn't help but be otherwise."

"Thank you, Tim. But with my upbringing, I feel I must do more than be just a social butterfly."

"You can always marry," he said. "That is actually what I was referring to. A family would keep you quite occupied."

"It would indeed," I replied. "But I fear the subject is a little irrelevant at the moment."

"It is," he admitted. "Pray forgive me. It is just

that you are so young and lovely—and unprotected."

"Please," I raised a hand to restrain him. "I am a very frightened young woman. Don't overwhelm me."

"And, since you came to me, I'm going to see to it that whoever is instilling this fear into you, is uncovered. Tell me, has Raymond Hayes ever discussed Clara or Lillian with you?"

"Only to tell me of Clara's infatuation for him. It was understandable, for I was concerned about her. I could see that he was not in love with her and I knew she worshipped him."

"I believe Lillian finds him quite attractive," Tim ventured.

"He's an attractive gentleman. Charming, gracious, and poised. Naturally, he would have to be. I also believe he is very ambitious. While I was vexed with him after Clara's tragic death, I still had to admire him for not attempting to woo her in order to marry her for her wealth. He could have risen to the top at once."

"He could, but he prefers to make it on his own, I'm sure," Tim said.

"Tim," I said impulsively, "will you accept me as a client—handle all my affairs?"

"Thank you for your trust—and faith, Nancy," Tim said. "You are most kind and generous. But, believe me, you are not under any obligation to me for believing your stories. I intend to help you personally. As for your interests, it would be wise to let Raymond's firm handle it for the present, at least. His associates are far better equipped than I. Also, I think it would be an excellent way for us to keep an eye on Raymond."

"Are you suspicious of him?" I asked in surprise.

Tim worried his lower lip a moment, then he said, "Nancy, when you die, Lillian gets the estate. That is, if she outlives you, of course. She is, I believe, somewhat enamored of Raymond—so I've been told—village gossip again." He smiled. "And Raymond is an ambitious young man. Lillian is a most attractive woman and although she is a few years Raymond's senior, she would make a most admirable partner for him in his profession."

"I had not thought of that," I admitted.

"Oh," he said shrugging, "it probably isn't worth a thought, but it's advisable to keep our eyes open. Tell me, will you give me permission to roam the estate whenever I wish?"

"Of course. Willingly."

"Thank you. I will tell you beforehand that, should Neil see me, he may attempt to give me some trouble. He has no particular liking for me. He came to me as a potential client. I turned him down."

"May I ask why?"

"I'll tell you—in confidence. He came to me for help as he had lost a great deal of money to a New York man who threatened to sue him when Neil couldn't pay. I refused the case for he had no defense. Besides, I do not care for the sort of work that gambling debts entail. Since then, however, Neil has regarded me with a great deal of contempt. He believes I have neither ambition nor intellect."

"Poor Neil," I said pityingly.

"Don't waste your sympathy on him," Tim said. "Besides, I think I might be jealous."

"Why, Tim Kenton!" I exclaimed.

"No need to be surprised," he said. "I'm still smitten, but this is not the time nor the place to pursue this subject."

I had to agree, though I found his words quite heartening. "There is one thing more, Tim—it concerns the Chinese idol my father sent to Uncle Aaron. It was to be my legacy and was presented to him by a mandarin as payment for an operation."

"I know about it," the lawyer said, sobering. "It is most unfortunate. Aaron told me of the fraud."

"But how could it have happened?" I inquired earnestly.

"I don't know. Aaron was away when the Buddha arrived, he told me, but, when he returned and viewed it, he was both angry and sad that some sort of deception had been perpetrated on your father."

"Have you seen the substitution?"

"I have not."

"It is sickening to view, particularly since I saw the real Buddha. It was solid gold and very heavy; it could not have been merely placed in a pocket or a sack. Once en route, such an object would be difficult to steal."

"There's another point to consider. How could the duplicate have been made? And when was it made? Such work cannot be done in an offhand manner. It requires a study of the subject, the assembling of whatever supplies are needed, and in generous quantities, too. Then, some time is essential for duplicating what the sculptor has seen. And there again —we come to Lillian. Could she have done it?"

"Surely not Lillian!" I cried out in dismay.

"Why not?"

"But that would make her a thief!"

"It would. But we must not eliminate her because of that."

I shook my head sadly. "I just cannot believe she would do such a thing. I can think of nothing that would make her resort to such trickery. She had no need to do it. When Uncle Aaron was alive, she had money."

"Your argument, in her favor, is strong, yet I will not eliminate her as a suspect."

I shook my head. "I cannot believe that of her. I *will* not."

"Sometimes," Tim said mildly, "circumstance makes fools and thieves of us, Nancy. The idol was there. Lillian is a very good sculptress. She had the opportunity and the skill."

"But she had no reason to do such a thing. Besides, it is not a good duplicate. Her work is meticulous, and the fake idol is not."

"Well, it's worth considering."

Tim collected his long limbs from their loose positions around the chair, arose, and went to the window. I heard the late morning train pulling in. He looked at his watch and then at the Seth Thomas clock on the wall of his office, as if checking the arrival was a ritual rarely missed.

"Right on time," he said, "and I predict Raymond Hayes just got off. Are you generous enough to give him a ride? He'll be along in a moment to rent a carriage from the stable."

"Of course," I said.

Tim shot up the window, leaned out and looked down the street. Then he called out to Raymond

Hayes. In a few moments, he entered the office and was astounded to find me there. His eyes narrowed with suspicion.

"Are you trying to coax my client away from me?" he asked Tim. He said it with a smile, but he was deadly serious.

"Not at all," Tim said. "I'm hardly in a position to handle an estate as large as this one. It would be necessary for me to have New York City connections and I have none. Though," he added with a teasing smile of his own, "I might enlist the services of your firm if it becomes necessary."

Raymond accepted the reply in better grace than I thought he might. "Oh, very well, Kenton. Nancy, how have you been?"

"Not happy," Tim replied for me. "That's why she came to see me. Some odd things are happening at Cliffside and you'd best be made aware of them."

Tim quickly outlined the events as I had described them to him. Raymond seemed duly impressed.

"Footsteps, a stranger masked with a scarf around his face, would-be murderers, a pool of blood—Nancy, are you quite sure——?"

"I'm positive," I cried out in hurt at his doubt.

"Perhaps you should leave Cliffside, return to the city," Raymond suggested. "You could stay at the best hotel, and it would take your mind off the terror you have been through."

I smiled wryly. "It appears that everyone wants me to leave Cliffside. It almost seems like a conspiracy."

"You mean Kenton suggested it?" Raymond asked.

"No, but he's the only one who hasn't," I replied. "I am very much against leaving Cliffside because I believe that is the reason for those frights I've had. Someone wishes me to do just that. I prefer to remain in the hope I may find out who is behind such fiendish tricks."

I arose and extended my gloved hand to Tim. "Thank you for giving me so much of your time."

"It was a pleasure to see you, Nancy," Tim replied. "I only wish the circumstances of your visit were different. However, now that you are aware that there are definite forces working against you, you will be on guard."

His eyes regarded me solemnly as he released my hand and I knew he was telling me that he would come to Cliffside to watch over me. I lowered my eyes for fear there would be more than gratitude revealed in them, for I was, indeed, moved by this young man who had admitted he "had been smitten years ago." I repressed a satisfied smile and turned to Raymond.

"Will you accompany me back?" I asked him. "I will see to it that you get a ride to the depot."

"It will be a pleasure," he said, bowing. He was always the gallant, I thought. Ever working for his company, though I did chide myself for such an ungracious thought.

FOURTEEN

WHEN I was on the carriage seat, before Raymond and I drove off, I looked up at Tim's window. He was leaning out so far I felt a pang of fear that he would tumble. His smile was wide as he waved farewell. He had not confided in Raymond about what he intended to do and I would remain silent on the matter, for I believed Tim had good reason for his secretiveness. Raymond, on the journey back to Cliffside Castle, was not so complimentary to Tim as he might have been.

"I hope, Nancy, you will not take management of your estate away from us," Raymond ventured. "I do not believe Kenton is equipped to handle anything like the Cliffside estate. That is his own statement and it is a true one."

"I already told you, Raymond, for the present, I have no intention of making any change," I replied. "However, were I to do such a thing, I can think of no man I would trust further than Tim Kenton."

"I am not questioning his honesty, but his ability is something else. He's a small-town lawyer. His cases consist of work on deeds, giving advice——"

"And preparing wills," I said remindfully.

It was unkind, but I was irked with Raymond for having spoken in such a manner in regard to Tim. Raymond smiled. "I must admit it was an excellently drawn-up document. Yet I wonder why Clara went to him?" Raymond queried.

"Because he was a friend, and, I suppose, for the same reason I did. He inspires trust and that, I do believe, is one of the most important assets a lawyer can have."

"Are you insinuating that I do not?"

"Of course not," I replied in all honesty. "It's just that you were in New York and Tim Kenton was here. That makes a difference, too."

"I suppose it does. I also suppose I resent the man, likable though he is."

"In heaven's name, why should you?" I asked in amazement. "He was extremely kind to me and, what is more important, he believed every word I told him."

"And I didn't," Raymond said ruefully.

"You questioned my statements," I replied laconically.

"I did and I beg your forgiveness for I know now you are not a young woman given to vague fancies."

"You're thinking of Clara," I said, and again I felt some irritation.

Apparently, Raymond sensed it and his tone became contrite. "Please don't be angry with me for what happened to Clara," he pleaded. "I didn't love

her and I told her so in as kind a fashion as possible. I feel as bad as you that she took her life, but, perhaps, if she hadn't been drinking, it wouldn't have happened."

"Took her life? Drinking?" I asked, perplexed.

"Didn't you know she drank too much that night?"

"No," I replied, shocked. "She did have one glass of punch laced with sherry. But so did I. Neil brought us each a glass."

"Clara didn't stop with one glass," Raymond said.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't like to talk about it."

"Please tell me," I pleaded. "I'm not asking from morbid curiosity. I'm asking because I am trying to understand what happened. Why Clara died without crying out first."

The deliberate attorney was silent for a moment, as if debating whether or not to speak. I could understand his reticence because my cousin was dead and she could not defend her good name. Yet I had to know for I could not yet accept the fact that she had taken her own life.

"Do you still believe she committed suicide?" I asked, in a further effort to get him to tell me what was locked up in his mind.

"I do," Raymond stated firmly. Then, with a sigh, he told me the story.

"You know, of course, Clara and I took a walk in the garden."

"I know."

"She led me to a secluded spot. I accompanied her for I knew what was on her mind and I felt I could no longer pretend I was not aware of the depth of her

emotion for me. We were no sooner there than she declared her love for me; she told me that, if I married her, Cliffside would be mine. All of her worldly goods would be mine. It was a tempting offer for, astute young lady that you are, you have undoubtedly realized that I am a very ambitious young man."

"I'm aware of it and it is nothing to be ashamed of, so long as you are not a ruthless one."

"I hope I'm not. I wish, more than anything, to be a success. But I want to do it through my own efforts so my every thought is of that. I work selfishly for myself and my firm."

"I had guessed that."

"You don't like me very well, do you?"

"If not, it's because I'm prejudiced in favor of my cousin. I hated to see her hurt. I never laid eyes on her again after you led her outside until I saw her lifeless body."

"You didn't see her for a very good reason," he replied. "I tried to stop her emotional outburst, to tell her what I have just told you, but she wouldn't listen. She pleaded with me. It was—horrible."

Raymond pulled so hard on the reins as he spoke that the horse protested by shying a bit. I could well imagine Raymond's embarrassment, for whatever selfishness he possessed, brought about by his ambitions, he was ever the gentleman and such a scene must have been extremely distasteful to him.

"I grasped her arms," he continued after the horse had quieted, "and shook her a little, for she was almost hysterical as the full import of what I had finally told her penetrated her mind. It was at that moment that Neil, two glasses in hand, came along.

He was, obviously, looking for someone else, but Clara, after thrusting me from her, commanded Neil to give her a glass. Neil, rather amused at the scene he had come upon, quickly acquiesced. Clara then told me to leave. That she wanted to talk with Neil." He sighed, then added, "I did just that, for truly I was sickened by the scene."

I was shocked to hear of how Clara had humbled herself. And even more shocked to learn of her behavior when Neil came upon them. How desperately tortured she must have been to have done such a thing!

"That isn't all," Raymond said, interrupting my thought. "I went back to the house and about an hour later, Neil sought me out. He told me that Clara was still outside, that he had brought her more to drink at her insistence. That it would take both of us to bring her inside through the back door and to assist her up the back stairs to her room so that she would not be viewed by the guests. I went with him and, fortunately, we did succeed in getting her to her room without a single servant or guest catching a glimpse of her. She was, even then, morose and she had started to cry."

I was too shocked to speak. Yet, I had thought that Clara might have imbibed too much punch. I had thought of it because I knew the heartbreak she must have endured when Raymond was forced to reveal that his feelings for her were no more than friendly. That his relationship with her could be nothing more than that of attorney and client.

"Now do you understand why I believe her death was a suicide?"

I nodded.

"I shall never believe it to be anything else," Raymond added insistently. "And while I shouldn't be, I am burdened with the thought of her death."

"It still could have been murder," I mused. "If the same villain who tried to throw me over the railing, went to Clara's room and picked her up, she would have been helpless either to resist or cry out."

"That is true, but I cannot believe anyone would invade the house when it was full of guests."

"It would take a maniac to do it," I replied in agreement, "or someone very familiar with the surroundings."

"Do you think Neil capable of such a thing?" Raymond asked.

"Hardly. Especially not that night because when the ball ended, he was quite—tipsy. I did not see you later on though."

"I retired immediately after he and I delivered Clara to her room. I was sickened by the whole incident and wished only that there was a train so that I might leave Cliffside immediately. I felt I had no right here."

"Yet you wish to continue to represent the Furnivall estate?"

"My firm wishes that," he said, correcting me.

"Ah," I said, nodding agreement. "Always your firm. It is almost as if you have made it your religion."

"Perhaps it is," he said quietly, "but I can be no different. I do not wish to be different. I have planned my life and will live it in accordance with those plans.

I know that makes me out a limited individual, yet I will never be otherwise."

Somehow, I felt sorry for this young man. I knew it was good to set a goal for one's life, yet to pursue it to the exclusion of everything else, seemed to me, selfish. I had a feeling that Raymond would one day be a very lonely man for he would never have taken the time to have made friends who could bring pleasure and fulfillment to his life. I wondered if he would ever allow himself to fall in love. His next words came as quite a surprise.

"Nancy, just what do you think of me?"

I smiled. "I think you're a tremendously ambitious, but candid, young man."

"Do you hate me for what happened to Clara?"

"No," I said. "I'm glad you told me what happened for I know that, up until now, I did feel a resentment toward you because of her death."

The faintest trace of a smile formed on his mouth. "Thank you, dear Nancy. You know, it would be easy for me to fall in love with you."

"You would allow yourself the luxury of such an emotion?" I asked with smile.

"For you, yes. But you would not be happy with me. Nor could you ever love me."

"I fear you are right," I said. "While I would not want to be selfish, demanding, or possessive with the man I loved, I would like to feel that I came first. With you, it would always be your work. After that, your wife."

"How discerning you are," Raymond said. "At least, I know where I stand. And now, since I must

return on the late afternoon train, may I tell you my reason for coming?"

"Pray do."

"Thank you. I brought some documents for you to sign. Also, you have some decisions to make. Especially concerning stock in an old sailing-ship line which wishes to convert to steam. You own many shares, but there would be no dividends for years, if ever, should you vote to give them authority to convert."

"Do I need the income from this stock?"

"No—no, you do not, but you would suffer a rather large loss if the firm failed."

"I give you authority to take steps to investigate, and if the firm shows any signs of being able to make good, I shall vote my stock to help them. I came here from China on a sailing ship. The trip was tedious and discomforting. If there is any hope for improvement on the seas, I'm for it."

"The lady has a mind of her own," Raymond observed, his tone admiring. "That's all to the good."

I touched the large brown envelope which was ever a part of Raymond. "Did you bring more documents?"

"Yes, I will need a good part of your afternoon to discuss them with you."

"I am most grateful to hear that, for it will take my mind off the personal problems which beset me at Cliffside."

"Will it?" he asked and there was a slight cynicism to his voice. "Everything in this envelope concerns Cliffside and the fortune that you fell heiress to."

"Nevertheless, it will keep me occupied and that is of the greatest importance."

"I agree."

I frowned as I recalled a conversation I had had with Clara.

"Why did you not allow my cousin a greater voice in the affairs and investments of the Furnivalls?" I asked the attorney she had trusted.

"She was scarcely equipped."

"She told me her father had trained her to manage the estates."

"Her father indulged her, Nancy," Raymond said with a smile. "She was extremely possessive and he humored her, but, pray believe me, she had no talent for making decisions such as the one you just made. Clara, I am sorry to say, was a creature guided by her emotions. Either she loved or hated. There seemed to be no in-between."

I made him no answer, but I had to admit to myself the wisdom of his words, for I had heard almost the same observations about Clara from Tim. I had loved Clara and I would revere her memory, but I fear her father did spoil her by granting her every whim so that when adulthood came, she was not prepared for it.

I had learned a lot this day—about Tim Kenton, about Raymond, and about Clara. Some of it had been heartening, some of it tragic, but none of it would I ever forget.

FIFTEEN

When we reached Cliffside and drove up to the house, we saw a strange carriage tied to the hitching post. We went inside and there, seated in the formal parlor and enjoying tea with Lillian, were Arthur Seaton and his sister Virginia. After greeting them in friendly fashion, I turned to Lillian who presented me with a cup of tea. Raymond also joined us.

I noticed Lillian's hand tremble as she handed Raymond his tea and I wondered if she were actually enchanted by his company. Then my eyes searched her face. I was rather startled to notice her eyes were red-rimmed as if she had been crying. She must have noticed me staring for she picked up a plate of cookies and offered them to me.

"Mrs. Donahue made them herself," she said in a confidential manner, "and, if any go back to the kitchen, she will take it as a personal offense."

I took one and bit into it. "My, they are delicious, but fattening, I'll wager," I said. And they must have been for they were yellowed with the creamy butter that had gone into the making of them. I then turned

my attention to the Seatons. "How good of you and your sister to pay us a visit."

"We believed we should begin breaking down this foolish barrier which has existed for too long between our families, Miss Nancy," Virginia Seaton said. Her dress was of purple satin and her slightest movement made it rustle. Atop her head was perched a matching bonnet. It gave her a delicate air. But then, her petiteness gave her a look of gentility that was subtly impressive.

"It pleases us that you have come, Miss Seaton, and I do hope it is only one of many social visits between us."

"Thank you, my dear," Arthur Seaton said in his customary brusque manner. "Virginia was a little reluctant about coming, but I assured her that, having met you earlier, I felt certain you would welcome us in civil fashion."

"I wasn't aware that you had met," Raymond spoke over his teacup.

Mr. Seaton and I exchanged knowing glances.

"Yes," I said. "I went riding with Neil and Clara. It was Mr. Seaton who rescued me when Saracen was frightened by a snake, though I never revealed that to either Clara or Neil."

"It's just as well you didn't," Virginia said and her soft voice was like the tinkle of bells. "Poor Clara. She was never the same after her father died."

"How could you have known, Miss Seaton?" I asked curiously.

"Only from village gossip," she replied, almost apologetically. "Forgive me for having mentioned it. The poor girl has been gone such a short time."

"Yes," I agreed. "And I grieve for her. However, I do not believe in feuds nor spite fences. And the one which separates our property will come down as soon as I can attend to it."

"That is heartening to hear, my dear," Virginia said, her smile appreciative. "And I hope you and Mrs. Furnivall will come to tea one day soon."

I looked at Lillian for approval, but she remained silent. "Of course, we will, won't we, Lillian?"

"Yes," she replied quietly. "Whenever you say."

I wondered what was wrong with this woman who was usually so enchanting and never at a loss for words. It seemed that Virginia and I were the only ones talking, with her brother putting in a word now and then.

They finished their tea and Virginia arose. "We must not remain longer for we know you must have business with Mr. Hayes. We thank you for your hospitality and, remember, do come to tea soon. Let us be friends again."

She extended her hand and I took it. "I will accompany you outside," I said, "as proof that I am as desirous as you that we have an amiable relationship."

Arthur Seaton followed us out to the carriage. I remained on the porch until they were on their way. Virginia waved a farewell as Arthur urged the horse on to a greater speed.

I returned to the parlor and found Lillian alone. She didn't hear me enter and she was pacing across the rug before the fireplace.

"Lillian, are you ill?" I asked with concern.

She spun around and there was a look of abject terror on her face. "Oh, my dear, you startled me."

"I'm sorry, but when I returned, I noticed that you seemed to have been crying."

"Of course not," she said, attempting a smile which only succeeded in looking like a break in a mask. "It's just that—well, I *am* upset to some extent."

"Over what, pray tell?"

"I cannot remain at Cliffside much longer. While my decision to make such a move has upset me, still I am insistent upon doing so."

"Have I had any influence on your decision?" I asked worriedly.

"Indeed not."

"Then why can you not stay? I have told you that you are welcome here. If there is anything I can do to make you more comfortable——"

"No, no, my dear, it is nothing like that. It's just that Cliffside Castle depresses me. It has ever since Aaron died. Clara didn't help matters, but now that she has gone, I find I can no longer remain here. Somehow, with her suicide, I feel responsible. I feel that, had I been more discerning, she would never have resorted to such a thing."

I wondered what Lillian would have said had she known that Neil had been the cause of Clara being in such an intoxicated state the night she went over the railing that she was in no condition to know what she was doing. I could not bear to add to Lillian's misery for I felt she was not being deceitful. I was certain her despondency over Clara's death was genuine.

"Lillian, I do not know about your life with Clara

before I came to Cliffside, but I know you attempted to be friends with her after my arrival. I know you were rudely rebuffed. However, I felt that, as we planned the ball, she had forgotten a lot of her animosity."

"It wasn't just animosity," Lillian said, almost with bitterness. "It was hatred. You know that. You know how she acted at the ball. How she spoke to me within the hearing of the guests."

"I know," I said sadly, "and it pained me greatly that she should do so. But, perhaps, we should not be too hard on the girl. Remember she was deeply in love with Raymond. Her love was spurned that night. And up until that night, her love was unrequired. That, in itself, may have made her disagreeable."

"Perhaps," Lillian admitted and her eyes had a faraway look, as if she was once again seeing Clara and recalling the efforts she had made to gain her friendship. "But we shall never know. And now, my dear, there is something else I must tell you," she said with a sigh.

"It sounds like bad news," I said, eying her with concern.

"I fear it is. The servants are giving notice. About half of them already have. I didn't tell you because—well—I had hoped it would stop. But after last night when Mrs. Donahue roused them to make a thorough search of the house, they don't wish to work here. She should never have done such a thing."

"Her intentions were of the best though. What are they fearful of—me?"

"No," she said. "They're superstitious. They imag-

ine they hear Clara moving about—or see her shade —you know how some simple people are. And, of course, Cliffside is isolated and lonely."

"What about Mrs. Donahue?"

"I doubt she will leave you. I heard her scolding the servants this morning about having such foolish ideas."

"About me?" I asked again.

"Yes," she admitted reluctantly.

"They think I'm daft," I said soberly. "Let them go then. I'll remain here if I have to do so alone."

It was a brave statement and, inwardly, I wondered if I would have the courage to carry out my decision. But I was not going to run unless some force much stronger than I, made me do so.

"Why don't you sell Cliffside?" Lillian went on quietly. "It's not a place for a pretty young girl to live. It's bleak and dismal, full of unpleasant memories. Cliffside has done nothing for you, my dear. It's expensive to maintain, besides being so isolated. I know Clara would never have considered selling it, but Clara was a far different kind of girl. She was like the house—cold and distant, dreary, forbidding. I have been here less than two years and it has had an averse influence upon me. I have grown to hate it, and you will, too, dear Nancy."

I looked about the bright parlor and I could see nothing dreary or dismal about it. True, the estate was isolated, but, to me, it had a majestic air about it. I felt a sense of pride in ownership. Besides, here I was away from the bustle and noise of a city like New York, fascinating though the urban life seemed to be.

"I shall remain," I said. "If I tire of Cliffside, I can

always go away for a time, but I wish it to be here so that I may return whenever I wish. Perhaps the difference in the way we feel is because I am a blood Furnivall and Cliffside has a meaning to me. Whatever it is, I shall not be tempted away nor frightened away. Furthermore, Clara stipulated that I not sell it."

"You do not condemn me for leaving?"

"No, for I can understand that your stay here has not been as pleasant as it might have been, with the loss of Aaron so soon after you arrived, and then the hatred of Clara and, finally, her death."

"Thank you, my dear, for feeling that way," Lillian said. "As for Cliffside, I never wanted it, but I wish Clara hadn't made her hatred and contempt for me so obvious as she did in the changing of her will. But even if she had left the estate to me, I would have promptly disposed of the Castle as I have attempted, without success, to persuade you to. Perhaps things have worked out as they were meant to, and Cliffside will remain in the possession of a blood Furnivall."

"I love it here," I said, "in spite of the tragedy of Clara's death."

"Then you should stay. I shall be leaving as soon as I finish the bust of Clara and set it up. After that, I will arrange to have my studio moved. I do hope it won't take longer than a week, for I must get back to my work. It is my life now."

"I understand. However, remember that you will always be welcome here for I know that is the way Uncle Aaron would wish it."

Lillian came over to me and placed her cheek

against mine. "God bless you, my dear. You are so filled with goodness."

Her eyes glistened as I added, "Neil is welcome too. I know how much he loves horses and enjoys riding even though he, too, is anxious to leave Cliffside."

"So he has already told you? Neil hasn't found himself yet. I am hopeful that the change will do it. I think this place depressed him. And now, my dear, you had better retire to the den where Raymond awaits you. From the somber expression on his face, I believe he has much to discuss with you."

It required most of the afternoon for Raymond to explain the meaning of the documents and papers he had brought for me to sign. Even then, he had to leave several for me to study so I could either approve or disapprove of executing them. I promised to attend to them before the day's end so that they would be mailed to him early on the morrow.

He left Cliffside around five o'clock and it wasn't until almost eight that I rubbed my eyes which were tired from studying papers. My brain was also wearied, for all legal responsibility was new to me and I was trying to absorb too much too soon.

It was Mrs. Donahue who interrupted me at my work. "You've done enough for one day, Miss Nancy. Please come and have something to eat. I'm sorry to say that you'll be eating alone."

"In that case, Mrs. Donahue, I beg of you to join me. I wish to speak with you anyway."

"If you'll pardon me, Miss, I've already eaten, but I'll be glad to sip a cup of tea with you. Indeed, I'll be honored."

"What would I do without you?" I asked.

"No need for you to worry about it," the loyal housekeeper said emphatically.

We sat in the breakfast room, for Mrs. Donahue informed me that Lillian had sent word she wasn't hungry and Neil as yet hadn't returned from his wanderings. When Mrs. Donahue told me the last, she raised her eyes heavenward as if the young man were, indeed, beyond help. I was of the firm opinion that she believed exactly that.

"Mrs. Furnivall tells me that several of the servants are leaving."

"That they are," Mrs. Donahue said, sniffing. "And let them go. 'Twill be a long day before they find as good a place as this."

"They fear me, don't they?" I asked; my smile was resigned.

"They're blithering idiots, if you'll pardon my saying so. Don't you fret, Miss Nancy, we'll get along without them if need be. But there's one sure thing. If they change their minds, they won't get a chance to come back and, believe me, change their minds they will. They loved it here until——"

"Until my cousin's death and my fright of last night."

"Yes, Miss," she admitted, casting her eyes downward, as if she felt it were a reflection on her. "But I'll stay, never fear."

"Thank you. However, I feel I must tell you that I had another frightening experience before Clara's death."

I went on to relate to Mrs. Donahue about the

night the intruder picked me up on the balcony in an attempt to throw me over.

"It was Clara's screams which saved me. Weren't the servants disturbed by them?" I asked.

"No, Miss. We're on the other side of the house and it's a well-constructed place. Not even I heard it, and I'm a light sleeper. But your story won't frighten me away. I'll stay with you for it is what the late master would have wanted me to do. Miss Clara was spoiled, that I will grant, and 'twas a pity she couldn't get on with Mrs. Furnivall who really did try to make friends with the girl, as did her ne'er-do-well son. But Miss Clara would have none of them. Stayed to her room all the time until you came. I felt so pleased about your arrival. I thought for sure things would be different 'cause you did have a good influence on the girl." She shook her head sadly. "What a pity she saw fit to do such a thing."

"Maybe she didn't," I said softly.

"Miss, you don't think that—that——" Her eyes widened in the horror of the thought.

"I think it's quite possible that intruder returned."

"But why didn't she scream—you'd have heard her just as she heard you."

My brow furrowed in perplexity. It would be unseemly to reveal to Mrs Donahue what Raymond had told me of Clara's indiscretion the night of the ball.

"Perhaps she didn't have a chance to do so. It may be she was out on the balcony as I was that night. Fortunately, I wasn't near the edge. She may have been."

"But I shouldn't think she'd have ventured out there after your near escape."

"Don't forget, Mrs. Donahue, there was a houseful of guests. She may have felt quite safe. I believe I would have."

"But who could it be?" she questioned—more herself than me.

"If we but knew the answer to that, the terror would leave Cliffside."

"You're right about that, Miss Nancy. You're certainly right about that. Miss Clara did hate Mrs. Furnivall and her son."

I nodded. "But can you see either of them committing an act of murder?"

"Hardly, Miss Nancy. Hardly."

"Nor can I. I believe Mrs. Furnivall feels very badly about Clara's death. She is carving a head of her to be placed before her crypt. I suppose even now she is working at it, for she wishes to leave here in a week's time."

" 'Tis a shame the way they're all walking out on you."

"But not you, Mrs. Donahue."

"Not me, indeed, Miss."

"This is excellent Indian pudding," I told her, as my spoon scraped the dish.

"I made it meself, Miss. Cook is one of those who already left. I don't mind a bit her leaving. She resented taking orders from me. She never could cook as good as meself anyway, if you'll pardon my saying so."

"You needn't apologize," I told her, repressing a smile. "The roast beef and vegetables were delicious, too, and I imagine you prepared them."

"I did," she said emphatically.

I touched my napkin to my lips and arose. "Thank you again, Mrs. Donahue, for remaining here. I hope you will be able to persuade some of the servants to remain. If not, we will manage as best we can."

"That we will, Miss," she said emphatically. "That we will."

"Good night, Mrs. Donahue. I'm returning upstairs now for I still have many papers to peruse. I shan't be down again this evening."

"Yes, Miss. And Miss," she hesitated. "Miss—if you'll pardon me for saying this, but I think it only fit to tell you the late master used to say that Cliffside was secure because, even if his family died out, his brother's would not so there would always be a Furnivall to take over. Now you're the only one left, Miss. That is, until you have children of your own."

I smiled. "That is not in the foreseeable future, Mrs. Donahue, but thank you for telling me. It serves to make my determination to remain here stronger. And I believe it is what has caused you to make the same decision."

"A good bit of it," she admitted. "But your sweet presence is an added incentive. Part of me duties will be to look after you."

"Mr. Kenton told me you were reliable," I said, in praise.

She smiled. "A fine young man he is. You will do well to cultivate him, Miss. There's none better around."

I could feel the color rush to my face, but I felt no embarrassment because of it. Timothy Kenton had had quite an effect on me. He had earned my respect and admiration and I sensed that he could be amus-

ing when he so wished and when the occasion called for it.

I smiled as I said, "He's a fine young man and he was a great help to me today."

Then I bade the housekeeper good night, returned to the den to gather up my papers, and went upstairs to my suite.

SIXTEEN

THAT NIGHT I began to understand that owning an estate and wealth such as was now mine didn't mean I could devote myself entirely to pleasure and while away the time. There were many responsibilities and decisions that went with it.

I found my room in readiness, the bed turned down, my nightdress across it. Mrs. Donahue was certainly taking thoughtful care of me. I prepared myself for bed, locked the corridor door, and then made certain the French windows overlooking the balcony were securely fastened.

About an hour later, Mrs. Donahue, in a throat-gripping nightdress and a voluminous gray flannel robe, knocked on the door. When I let her in, she brought a tray on which reposed a cucumber sandwich and a glass of warm milk.

"It will make you sleep the better," she said. "I've locked up downstairs."

"Thank you. Good night, Mrs. Donahue."

I locked the door again, carried the tray over to the bedside table and nibbled on the sandwich while

I read more about the sailing-vessel line which wished to convert to steam.

I sipped the milk, but I thought the cucumber gave it a strange taste so I let the glass of milk cool and, finally, just before I put out the lamp, I dumped it down the sink, for, after the heavy meal I'd eaten, I had no desire for it.

I felt secure now. Safe and snug in this enormous building which was now my property and my home. I lay in the darkness, telling myself over and over again that Lillian was wrong. That Cliffside was not dreary and dismal; that all it needed was life—people about, music, and laughter. I intended Cliffside Castle should once again, in time, have all of that.

I fell into a dreamless sleep, but for how long I didn't know. When I awakened, it was gradually, with the apprehension that I was not alone in the bedroom. I lay quietly, all my senses alert as I reasoned that if I screamed or leaped out of bed, I would be quickly attacked. I dared not open my eyes to see who had invaded my locked suite. It was better to pretend sleep and lie motionless until the best chance for escape came.

I felt a draft of air about me and I knew that it was its coolness which had awakened me. I was aware then, that the French doors stood open. Yet I had fastened them! Someone had entered my suite, undoubtedly by the parlor door. Yet I had locked that, too! However, it would be a simple enough matter to force the key from the lock, insert another, turn it and enter. I could hear quiet movements. Yet the fact that I had an awareness of them gave evidence that the person was not moving about as stealthily as

might be expected of an intruder in the room of a sleeping person.

I remembered the strange taste of the warm milk, and having blamed it on the cucumber sandwich. Then a sudden thought occurred to me. There could have been something in the milk to make me sleep. That was why the intruder believed it unnecessary to use caution. He thought I was in a drugged sleep.

I let these ideas flash through my mind as I waited for I knew not what. Hardly a murder out-of-hand. I slowly opened and closed my fingers to make certain my sensed were not drugged. My muscles and nerves responded well. I wondered if Mrs. Donahue could have prepared a sleeping draught, but I refused to entertain the idea very long. She was a benevolent soul who wished me only well. If the warm milk had been tampered with, then someone else had done it while Mrs. Donahue was not looking.

I sensed whoever was in the room was now standing beside the bed. I still dared not open my eyes. I refrained with an effort from stiffening in terror or calling out in my fear. Then, suddenly, the covers were thrown back, an arm was slipped beneath my knees, another arm encircled my shoulders and I was lifted. Whoever it was, possessed great strength. And whoever it was took no precautions to move quietly. I was certain now that this person believed me to be drugged.

I knew I had to do something to save myself from the fate I now was certain had befallen Clara. I opened my eyes. It was the same individual who had tried to hurl me off the balcony before. The same scarf covering the face, the same piercing eyes, the

color of which was clouded by the darkness. I gave a hard kick with both legs and my unexpected return to life so startled the intruder that he lost his grip on me and I fell back onto the bed.

I was up in a flash, racing for the parlor and the door through which I might escape. At the same time, I emitted the loudest scream I could, and repeated it several times, but the intruder was still coming after me.

If I got clear of this suite, I thought I could escape, for I was fleet of foot and impelled by fright, but, when I reached the door, my rising hopes exploded into thin air. The door was locked and the key had been removed. I whirled about ready to do battle, for I was no longer the frightened girl just back from China where I'd undergone terror equal to, or worse, than this. I was now the owner of Cliffside and I was protecting my life and my own property.

The dim form moved without haste for he knew quite well that I was trapped. I seized an unlighted lamp on the table beside the door and hurled it at him, but I missed and it didn't impede his advance.

"What do you want?" I cried out as loudly as possible. "Who are you? What cowardly reason makes you hide beneath a mask?"

He said nothing, but kept on coming toward me. I was no match for him, of course. I was now certain this was a man, for his strength gave away that fact. It was impossible to tell who he was for he wore not only the scarf-mask, but a cloak, which hid his figure well. The rather large hat coming down to his brows, also helped to shield his identity.

In a moment now he'd make a lunge and I must

move aside and try to retrace my steps, this time to the balcony. Out there, perhaps I could make myself heard, though it wasn't too likely, with most of the servants gone. And it was certainly not a safe place, for I knew this man intended to throw me over the balcony and I'd be considered another suicide.

He moved toward me and I screamed again. Why didn't someone come? Surely somebody could hear my cries for help. Had everyone left the house? The attacker was quite close and my hopes were ebbing fast. I meant to kick and scratch and bite, to inflict all the punishment I possibly could on him, to mark him if I was that fortunate.

Then I heard a shout. It came from the balcony and it was followed by the sound of someone rushing toward the bedroom. The intruder cast one swift look over his shoulder. He leaped toward me, brushed me aside with a single powerful sweep of his arm. I was thrown against the wall with such force that I fell, but I watched him. He produced a key from somewhere on his person and he had the door open in a flash. He stepped through it, slammed it shut and locked it from outside just as a second dim form came rushing from the bedroom into the parlor.

I was slowly rising from the floor where I had been hurled. Then someone grasped me and helped me up. Two arms went around me, but they were not meant to crush and kill. They held me gently and the voice that spoke to me was tender with compassion.

"Did he hurt you?"

"Tim," I cried out. "Oh, Tim, you saved my life."

"Are you all right?" he asked again.

"Yes—yes. He had no time to harm me, though that was his intent."

"I've got to see if I can catch that monster——"

Tim let go of me and tried to open the door. He gave up with a sigh of dismay.

"No use—he'll be gone before I can break down that door. Sure you're not hurt, Nancy?"

"No—no, but I'm terribly frightened."

I was trembling with fear, but I went into the bedroom, put on my dressing gown and my slippers and returned to the parlor where Tim awaited me. My steps were none too steady for I was still shaking from my ordeal.

"Can you tell me what happened?" Tim asked. He had already lit a lamp and the light seemed merciful, but not as much as his dear presence.

"First of all, Mrs. Donahue brought me some warm milk and a cucumber sandwich. I didn't like the taste of the milk, but blamed it on the cucumbers. Now I believe the milk contained a sleeping draught."

"Mrs. Donahue!" Tim exclaimed, his eyes showing his amazement.

"I'm sure she had nothing to do with it. She may have left the kitchen for a moment and someone else slipped the draught in the milk. Fortunately, I took only a few sips."

"Thank God," he said fervently. "Please go on."

"Fortunately, I must sleep lightly for I was awakened and sensed someone was in my suite. I kept my eyes closed, pretending sleep. The next instant, the covers were thrown off me and I was lifted. No attempt was made by the intruder to be overly quiet.

That is why I believe there was a sleeping draught in the milk and he felt quite secure."

"Didn't you lock your parlor door?" he asked.

"I did," I said. "Apparently, he forced the key from the lock and entered with another. However, I fought off the intruder and slipped from his grasp. He was pursuing me when you came."

He moved close to me and his arms went around me. "I love you, Nancy Furnivall. I swear if anything had happened to you, I'd have pursued the murderer and throttled him with my own hands."

"Tim," was all I could manage, for suddenly I was so filled with my own love for this dearest of persons I could say no more.

Tim bent forward and, when his lips were an inch from mine, he said, "May I?"

I nodded, still speechless.. Tim kissed me and for the few moments our lips touched and held the embrace, all fear went out of me and I knew for the first time the ecstasy of love. This was only a beginning, but I thought my heart would burst with the wonderment of it.

Then he broke the embrace and stepped back. "This is no time to make love to you, Nancy. But, when I thought you were going to be harmed, it sent such a horrible shock through me, I couldn't think. Then when I found you safe, I wanted to take you in my arms."

"I'm glad you did, Tim," I said tremulously, "for, suddenly, I knew I loved you, too."

"Bless you," he said as he bent and lightly kissed my brow. "And don't forget it for one moment."

"I shan't," I assured him, "for such knowledge

has given me the courage to face this mysterious menace."

"This murderer," Tim amended. "And we're going to get him."

Just then, a knock came on the door. Tim bent and whispered in my ear. "They're finally aroused. Before I call out to them, I want you to come to me tomorrow morning. Tell them you wish to consult with me. We are going to New York to return in the afternoon."

"But why——?"

"Do not ask questions now. You'll learn what this is about soon enough. Now let's see if we can find out who came to kill you—and who may have aided him."

Someone pounded on the door again. It was Lillian and she called out in an anxious voice.

"Find a key to fit this door," Tim called back. "This is Tim Kenton."

Lillian was gone a few moments and then she returned to unlock the door and Tim flung it open. Lillian and Mrs. Donahue looked at us with eyes wide in wonder. But when I heard Lillian's hasty footsteps as she went to get a key, I knew it was she I'd heard pacing outside my door the night before.

"Someone tried to murder Nancy," Tim explained. "I was outside, watching and waiting for just such a thing to happen. Whoever it was managed to get away. I believe he meant to throw Nancy down on the red bricks—as I believe he threw poor Clara."

"Lillian," I asked, "where is Neil?"

"I don't know," she confessed. "I believe he must

have heard you screaming and has run out onto the grounds to see if he could find anyone prowling about."

"You saw no one, Mrs. Donahue?" Tim asked her.

"No, sir. I was sound asleep when I heard Miss Nancy cry out."

I took Mrs. Donahue aside. "Early this evening you brought me up a sandwich and a glass of warm milk which was very thoughtful of you. Did you, at any time, set the glass of milk down so that someone could have place a draught in it without your being aware of that?"

She nodded. "Yes—yes, when it was heating, I had it on the back of the stove and I thought the cucumbers in the icebox were not fresh enough, so I went down to the vegetable cellar to get fresher ones."

"Did you see anyone near the kitchen?"

She hesitated for a moment. "I saw Master Neil and Mrs. Furnivall both."

"Thank you," I said. "We shall say no more of this to anyone for now. Please respect my confidence, Mrs. Donahue."

She nodded that she would and we returned to where Tim and Lillian were talking. Lillian was very pale, almost white with fear.

"I will leave here tomorrow or the next day," she said. "After this, I cannot remain any longer."

"Lillian," I asked, "do you know who is doing this?"

"No, I do not," she replied—perhaps a little too swiftly.

We heard someone coming up the stairs and it proved to be Neil. He was fully dressed, even to rid-

ing boots, and he came toward us slowly. He looked tired and dejected.

"I saw no signs of anyone," Neil said. "Whoever the villain is, he seems to vanish like a wraith."

"I assure you he is real and not ghostly," I said. "For I have felt the strength of his arms. Somehow, he entered my rooms with a key. He must have dislodged the one on the other side of the door, let himself in, and then locked it to make certain I could not escape if I awoke. Then he opened the French doors and I do believe he meant to carry me to the balcony and throw me down. I also believe he murdered Clara."

"I don't know what to think," Neil said. "I'm very tired. I think Tim Kenton will do a better job of guarding you for the rest of the night than I. Forgive me."

He walked down the corridor to his room and he reeled slightly. I knew he had been drinking again, though he was fully aware of what I had said.

"We all need sleep," I said. "Tim, will you remain here for the night?"

"I intend to."

"Tomorrow, in the event you leave before I awaken, I wish to consult with you. In your office. I shall be there early. It will be a long consultation, if you have the time."

He bowed his head slightly. "I have as much time as your business requires, Nancy. As for tonight, I shall be right outside your door, and I may as well state that I am armed. Good night. I hope you manage to get some rest."

Mrs. Donahue rather reluctantly went to her room

on the top floor. Lillian walked slowly toward her open door and disappeared inside her suite. Tim turned to me and took me in his arms once again. Then he made certain the French doors were fastened securely.

When he returned to the parlor, he said, "Lock your door. I doubt that the murderer will return now that he knows we're awaiting him. Nevertheless, I'll remain outside your door until morning. Good night, my love. Try to sleep."

"I will," I promised as my eyes drank in every line of his face. "My dearest Tim."

He stepped outside the door, closed it and I turned the lock. Despite the terror of what I'd been through, I felt peace, contentment, and joy as I returned to my bed.

SEVENTEEN

No one suspected, the next morning, that I was continuing on to New York from what they thought was a simple trip to the village where I would consult with Tim Kenton.

I slept the remainder of that night very well indeed, for the mere fact of knowing that Tim watched outside my door was comforting enough to relieve me of all tension. However, I stayed awake dreamily for a time, thinking of my love for him, feeling his lips against mine again, his arms about me.

He was gone in the morning when I left my suite. Neither Lillian nor Neil came down to breakfast, but then I was quite early. Mrs. Donahue served me and I felt it no more than right to eliminate the deep worried frown on her forehead.

"Mrs. Donahue, when I questioned you last night about the milk, I meant no hint that I suspected you. As you told me, anyone could have entered the kitchen and placed the draught in the milk. In fact, you probably saved my life by being thoughtful enough to provide me with the cucumber sandwich

for, after eating it, I detected a faint, but strange, taste to the milk so I refrained from drinking it."

"But it was my fault for not watching it every minute," she said worriedly. "I knew there was danger here threatening you."

"Mrs. Donahue, the danger will soon be gone. Cliffside Castle is going to be a happy place to live, for I intend to make it so."

"You're a brave young lady considering what you've been through."

"I shan't feel sorry for myself, Mrs. Donahue, for in spite of what happened since my arrival at Cliffside, something has occurred which has brought great happiness into my life."

Her worried features relaxed in a smile. "Nor need I ask what it is. For it shows on your face as it did on his."

I smiled back. "Yes, I'm in love—and with Tim Kenton. Though I didn't know it until he saved me from a shocking fate."

"Tim Kenton," she said and from the way she spoke his name, I knew she had a fondness for him. "A finer young man there never was and his father before him was the same. No man was respected as greatly as Judge Kenton."

"Judge?" I asked. "I didn't know."

"A high judge too. Every flag in the state went on half-mast when he died these twelve or thirteen years ago."

"How proud he would be of his son," I said. "Now will you send word to have a carriage ready in twenty minutes? I have an appointment with my—lawyer."

I looked up at her with a small smile and she burst

into laughter; we forgot the dangers and the troubles of Cliffside Castle for a few precious moments.

Tim awaited me at his office. He had my carriage taken to the stable and we went directly to the depot. Try as I might, he refused to enlighten me as to the reason for the journey.

"You will have to bide with your curiosity for I wish this to be a complete surprise to you."

"But it must concern me and Cliffside."

"It does. It concerns you even more."

"But why should you go to all this trouble?"

"Why, girl, I've been in love with you since the day you arrived from China. I saw you from my window. I learned all about you from Clara. And when she told me about the first attack on your life, I couldn't stand aside and do nothing. I began to investigate on my own."

"Have you learned anything?" I asked. "You must have or we would not be setting out on a journey to the city."

"Pray be patient," Tim said, "for the answer to all of this will probably be made plain to you today. If I'm right in my reasoning, I know who killed Clara and tried to kill you—and why. I also know how he went about it and I despise him for what he has done. That's all I'll say now. Perhaps I will tell you more on our way back."

With that I had to be patient. The steam locomotive ride was shorter and more joyous than before. When we arrived in New York, Tim took me directly to a hansom cab and ordered the driver to take us to an uptown Fifth Avenue address.

Our destination was close to the residential limits

of New York City, though, with the new hotels at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street, the city was bound to spread in that direction. We stopped no more than a block from the huge ornate Vanderbilt mansion in front of a brownstone—a most elaborate one.

A uniformed butler bowed as he opened the door. "Good afternoon, Mr. Kenton," he said. "Mr. Claude is waiting in the library."

"Thank you, James."

Guiding me gently, Tim led me through this lavishly decorated and surprisingly large town house. In the library waited a young man of Tim's age who greeted Tim and bowed gallantly as Tim introduced me. His name was Claude Vandergrift and he stood beside an object which was completely covered with a muslin sheet. I was quite intrigued.

"I would like nothing better than to ask you to be seated," Mr. Vandergrift said. "However, I understand from Tim that there is an urgency to your journey and you must return to Cliffside."

"If Tim says that is so, then it is so," I replied.

"I fear it is," Tim said. "So I would appreciate it, Claude, if you would get to it. Nancy, you are about to be shown an object which I hope you will be able to identify."

"Very well," I said, still mystified.

Then Mr. Vandergrift removed the muslin cloth and I saw the real Buddha—the one of gold and precious gems which had been given to my father. I looked at Tim helplessly, not knowing what to say.

"Is this your property?" he asked.

I nodded. "Yes—it was left me by my father."

Mr. Vandergrift said, "Very well. I'll make the arrangements to return it to your possession."

"But I don't understand," I said.

"You will on the journey back to Cliffside," Tim told me. "It's not a pleasant story, but it clears up many things. Thank you, Claude, you've been of great help."

"My pleasure. I wish you could remain longer, but I shall look forward to your next visit. If you need any help, Tim, let me know."

"I will," Tim promised.

Tim took my arm and Claude walked with us to the door where we bade our adieus. The butler, by prearrangement, had a carriage waiting for us and we were taken promptly to the railroad station. There was time enough for a good dinner at the seafood room; then we were aboard another of those hard-riding, hard-seated passenger trains heading upriver for home.

"Settle back," Tim said, "and I'll give you the story as best I can. Some points are not clear, others may sound weak, but we'll sort it all out soon."

"You've been at work on this all the time, haven't you?" I asked.

"I told you—I fell in love when I saw you leave the depot that day you arrived. Then I heard from Clara and I knew you were in deep trouble. I couldn't stand by and let anything happen to you. So I began to dig—I went deep and I turned up some rather unexpected items."

"Please tell me," I said.

"First of all, Aaron and Lillian were in love. Clara maintained Lillian married him for his money, but

that is not true. Lillian has many fine qualities, but her son, I fear, does not. Yet she has defended and guarded him, as a mother usually does a son. In this case, I believe she should have turned him over to the law, but—it's difficult to know how a mother thinks where her only child is concerned."

"Neil stole the Buddha," I said, amazed.

"Yes. I told you before, Neil came to me when he was in trouble over a huge gambling debt. I couldn't help him and I refused the case, but this put me on guard so when things began to happen at Cliffside, I knew whom to check first. Neil was threatened with physical disfigurement if he didn't pay up. His mother gave him all the money she possessed, but it wasn't enough, so Neil managed to get the Buddha onto a cart of some kind and hauled it out of the house. It was possible to do because it had arrived at a time when Aaron was away. Clara, obviously, never saw the genuine one. He crated it, sent it to the city and sold it to an art dealer for about one-tenth of its value. In fact, I don't think the art dealer himself knew exactly what he had bought. Lillian, in desperation, fashioned a duplicate, working from memory, and hoped you would believe the real statue had been stolen en route from China."

"Claude is a schoolmate of mine and an old friend. He knows the art world so I went to him for help. He made inquiries and learned that a man he knew had purchased the golden Buddha from the art dealer. This man sent it to Claude's house and will turn it over to you. Since it was stolen, I have agreed he should be recompensed for what he paid, and I'm sure you believe that only fair."

"Yes, yes—but what has the stealing of the Buddha to do with Clara's death and the attempts to murder me?"

"As a lawyer, I know that whenever there is crime, there have to be suspects with motives. I couldn't convince myself that Neil was a potential murderer, and certainly Lillian could not be. I also realized that our murderer had to have help from within the house and, therefore, he must be able to exert power over at least one of the people living there. The culprit knew Neil had stolen the Buddha for he was a friend of the man who bought it. He threatened to turn Neil in. Lillian knew this also and she bribed this man in order to protect her son. It resulted in murder. I'm sure Lillian is suffering because of her actions. And, I believe, so is Neil."

"Arthur Seaton!" I said, exhaling the name in one breath. "It must be he."

"It is. As I said, when you hunt suspects, you do it by first looking for motives. At one time, the Seaton family owned the land where Cliffside is now. They were big patroons, with hundreds of people working for them on shares. Arthur Seaton and his sister consider themselves landed gentry, though they are without much land. However, their investments prospered and they are well off. They tried to buy Cliffside from Aaron and were rebuffed. Then they claimed part of his land belonged to them and they went to court to regain it. They lost. In answer, Aaron put up the brick wall."

"The Seatons had hoped to gain possession of the property from Lillian through blackmail," I said.

"That is exactly how they planned it. But Aaron

died and left everything to Clara. She was a restless, immature, despondent girl—the type who might be expected to take her own life. That's why Arthur Seaton tried to make it seem that she did. With Clara dead, Lillian the heir, the Seatons had the upper hand and could force Lillian to sell Cliffside to them."

"She even told them she was going to sell it," I said, recalling the day Raymond had read the first will.

"They'd probably ordered her to do that. In fact, I believe they attended the reading of the will so they'd be certain Lillian would make such a statement."

"They have their own house and land," I said. "Why do they want Cliffside too?"

"They do not have enough to suit them. What led me to suspect the Seatons strongly was the fact that Arthur Seaton and his sister have already been negotiating with agencies that bring in foreign farm labor. They were going to set up a hundred or more families on their estate—which would then include Cliffside—and the Seatons would once again be patroons. They consider nothing to be as important to the Seaton family history as that."

"Arthur Seaton must be mad," I said.

"He is obsessed with possessing Cliffside Castle and its many hundreds of acres and that, no doubt, has become an obsession. But he's dangerous and he mustn't be allowed to run loose."

"But what proof have we?" I asked.

"We have the Buddha, so we can confront Neil

with the gold idol. At least, Lillian and her son will know we are aware that they are guilty of the theft of the original Buddha and the substitution of the fake one."

"Arthur Seaton was going to murder me also last night," I said, still stunned at what I had learned.

"No doubt. And there is no doubt as to who gave him the key to Cliffside Castle so that he might obtain access to the house and to your rooms."

"It must have been Lillian or Neil, who placed a draught in my milk."

"Yes."

"And I remember when I first came to Cliffside, someone threw a large rock at me from near the brick wall. Whoever did it must have been concealed in a tree and, when I passed, it narrowly missed me. Undoubtedly, that was a way of frightening me so that I would leave. That man must have become enraged when I arrived at Cliffside and he hoped I would depart after that untoward incident."

"Right. Especially since he had already tried to murder Clara and only her awakening had frightened him away."

"It was Clara's screams which saved my life. I could not fight him; he was too strong."

"I think we had better confront Lillian and Neil and see if we can get them to break down."

"Do you believe they will?"

"I hope so, but I'm not at all certain."

"Can we prove any of this?" I asked. "So that the law may take care of Arthur Seaton."

"No, I'm afraid we cannot. If Neil or Lillian tes-

tify against him, they place their own freedom in jeopardy. But I shall see to it that Seaton is punished."

"How can you, Tim?"

"I'll find a way. Are you prepared to face them now—as soon as we get back?"

"Yes. For Mr. Seaton may be already planning an even more treacherous and dire attack upon me."

"True. And I will not risk your safety further."

Tim grew silent then, but I knew he was planning how he would move against Seaton and Neil, and yet soften the blow for Lillian. I would leave it all in his hands, for they would be capable ones, and I had little to fear from then on.

When we reached the village, Tim led me to the livery stable where my horse and carriage were waiting and we left at once for Cliffside. I felt as if this were my first visit here in years—that, when the trees gave way to the level ground and granted us a look up the slope at Cliffside Castle, I would be once more amazed and charmed by the place.

It was just that way. My hand sought Tim's and my fingers closed hard around his. This would be our home in the future, and we two would make it glow with life again. Its grayness lessened, its outlines became a thing of beauty, and all the grimness disappeared as if by magic. I knew now why it would always be Furnivall property. In the veins of Tim's and my children would run the same blood as that of the men and women who built Cliffside Castle and created a fortune by dint of their hard work and their abilities. That was how it would be forever. No one

save a Furnivall would ever own Cliffside. I made that vow and somehow I knew Tim agreed with me.

But now our duties were going to be unpleasant, for Lillian must be told that her world had collapsed. Neil would know he was in grave trouble and Arthur Seaton must be informed that his scheming had gotten him nothing—nothing, except a hangman's rope for the murder of Clara.

I would have been far more gratified if Tim could have had Arthur Seaton arrested for Clara's murder but, without proper evidence, it would be difficult to convict him. Lillian would be most reluctant to testify, if, indeed, she would admit anything. Neil, I suspected, was by nature a coward, and could never be prevailed upon to admit he had abetted a murder.

The carriage turned into the drive to the estate and I felt that I was truly home. There might be further danger this day and much unhappiness for some, however, when it was over, Cliffside would settle down to the blissful life it was meant for. But before that came to pass, I was to know more terror than I could have thought possible.

EIGHTEEN

Mrs. Donahue met us at the door. "We were worried," she said. "You have been away so long."

"I'm quite all right," I said. "Where are Mrs. Furnivall and Neil?"

"Somewhere on the estate. Mrs. Furnivall wondered if you had returned. I believe she is looking for you, Miss Nancy."

Tim said, "I'll go over to the Seatons at once. If you can find Lillian and Neil, have them in the library when I return and we shall settle these matters."

The ordeal couldn't be over fast enough to suit me. As it was somewhat of a long walk to the Seaton place, I suggested that Tim take a horse and I told him of the space Arthur Seaton had broken through the brick wall so that the trip would be even shorter. I wanted him back with me as soon as possible for, as I watched him ride away, I felt the fear which had beset me during my stay at Cliffside return. I didn't like the sensation, for now it was my home. I began my search for Lillian and my steps took me toward

the cliff's edge. It occurred to me that I had visited this area infrequently. Perhaps it had been wise, too, for it might be a most dangerous place with a murderer loose. But, now that I knew his identity, I was on guard. Tim was close. Nothing could harm me.

I found Lillian seated on a concrete bench overlooking the river and the far shore. This time, she could not disguise the fact that she had been crying. She looked up nervously as I approached and then she refused to meet my eyes. I sat down beside her.

"Dear Lillian," I said, "I've been to New York. I know about the stolen Buddha."

She raised her head and her eyes were filled with misery.

"Tim Kenton traced the real Buddha in New York. That is where I have been all day."

"Truly I did not mean for it to happen this way," Lillian said. "My son has brought much grief upon us due to his gambling and his cheating at the gaming tables, but he is still my son. I could do nothing other than to protect him."

"The theft of the Buddha I can forgive," I said gently. "But Clara's murder—that is different."

Lillian buried her face in her hands. "I didn't want it that way. I swear it. Arthur Seaton compelled us to do it. He said he would reveal Neil's theft of the Buddha. But I will confess all to you."

"I believe we know most of it. Even now, Tim is on his way to bring Arthur Seaton to Cliffside. Will you confront him?"

"I will for I cannot bear living with this guilt any longer."

"Then Arthur Seaton will be told he has lost his hold on you and Neil. Will Neil admit his guilt?"

"I hope so," she replied wearily. "I do believe he is sick with the knowledge of Clara's death and of what almost happened to you last night."

"And once before," I said remindfully.

She nodded.

Her arms extended in a pleading gesture. "I am not asking for mercy or forgiveness, but just for understanding. Do you have it in your heart and your mind not to hate us?"

"I do," I told her quietly.

"You see," Lillian went on, speaking as if it were a relief for her to unburden herself, "we had no knowledge at first that Arthur planned the murder of Clara. But the man is mad. Then he forced us to give him the key to the house and to your room. He swore he was not going to kill you, merely to frighten you."

"But that hardly rings true, since you placed a sleeping draught in my milk."

"I knew nothing of that," Lillian swore. "It must have been Neil."

She was weeping now and, much to my surprise, I placed a comforting arm around her.

"Arthur Seaton swore he did not kill Clara—that she had killed herself, Lillian sobbed. "I made myself believe him, though now I know he lied."

"Arthur Seaton is a ruthless man," I said. "An ambitious man as well. His family were once patroons. Tim Kenton told me of this. They were powerful, important people in the Hudson River Valley and their estates were huge. Patroons were the aris-

tocracy, but their days have gone by. Arthur Seaton does not believe that, I'm afraid."

"I know only that, unless I did his bidding, he would have Neil arrested. The things that he compelled me to do—he told me they were not important, no one was really hurt. He said you had no right here anyway. I was convinced, because I wanted to be convinced. But I was wrong and now I must atone for this in some way."

I said nothing for there seemed little comment that I could offer. We sat there looking out over the distant vistas. What a quiet, lovely place it was. The sun was low, the shadows of the distant forests were deepening and stretching. Below, the river flowed serenely on its way to the sea; it seemed impossible that murder and violence could be part of this tranquil scene.

"I shall get the Buddha back," I said. "And Arthur Seaton's hold on you and Neil will be gone, for I assure you no complaint shall ever be made. There is no longer anything to fear from this brutal, pitiless man."

"I believe Neil has learned a lesson from this for he has been beside himself with worry over you. Last night we did Mr. Seaton's bidding for the last time. We lied for him for the last time."

"Then let us go back to the house and wait until Tim returns. With Tim here, we have nothing to fear."

"I know. He is a far better lawyer than Raymond, and a much stronger man in physique and character. I believed I was in love with Raymond, but it was only the foolish dream of a woman growing old."

"Raymond had nothing to do with this?"

"He did not even suspect. He is convinced that Clara killed herself because her love for him was thwarted."

We arose and walked slowly along the path beside the cliff. Lillian's composure was slowly returning and I knew now that my original estimation of her as a warm, generous person had been correct.

We had reached the spot where the path veered away from the edge of the cliff. Arthur Seaton was hidden there, waiting for us. Of course, he was quite unaware that I knew the truth, that Tim was already taking steps to reveal him for what he was. Seaton knew only that I was here, conveniently near the cliff's edge so that he might hurl me over. Only Lillian was his witness and she was unable to testify against him because of what he knew about her son.

He stepped out before us. There was no mistaking his intent for he scowled darkly and motioned that Lillian was to stand aside. Once again, terror returned tenfold and I stood transfixed.

Lillian's horror was enough to rivet her to the spot as well. Neither of us could offer the slightest resistance and the audacious man moved toward me slowly. Then I backed away out of sheer instinct to save myself, but all I did was go nearer to the cliff's edge. In a moment, Arthur would give one savage rush, seize me, and throw me over the guardrail.

Tim was searching for Seaton on his own property. He couldn't possibly guess that I was in danger, and, even if he did, it was now much too late for him to protect me. I half stumbled on a slanted bit

of shale and, while I was off balance, he charged at me.

We never did learn how long Neil had been concealed close by, nor what he had heard and knew. But it was Neil who suddenly dashed out of the forest area; he brandished a gun—a revolver with a long barrel.

Seaton came to a stop, faced by Neil from a distance of no more than four feet. His wide face wrinkled into a vicious, unpleasant grimace.

"Get out of my way, you bumbling idiot," he said, "or I'll dispatch you too."

"No," Neil said. "No further. Turn around and leave here. Go away while you have the chance."

"You wouldn't shoot me," Seaton boasted. "You don't have the nerve. If you kill me, you'll go to prison for it, and they'll likely hang you."

"Hang me they may, but you'll be a dead man," Neil warned. "I know how to shoot and my hatred for you even now tightens my finger on the trigger."

"Fool!" Seaton shouted and lunged at him.

Neil fired. Seaton was thrown back by the bullet that hit him, but he didn't fall nor lose his balance. Instead, he seemed to double up in great pain and Neil, overwhelmed by what he had done, let the revolver sag in his grip. That was what Seaton had waited for. He charged him, wrapping his arms around Neil, pushing him further and further back, toward the rail, forcing him over.

Lillian screamed and rushed forward, but she was too late. Neil was already falling. As he toppled over the low rail, he had secured a strong grip on Seaton

and dragged him along. It was probable that Seaton had been badly weakened by the bullet which had torn into his chest for he gave little resistance and the two of them went tumbling down out of sight. I rushed to Lillian, gathered her in my arms, and held her close. I buried her head against my bosom so that she wouldn't hear the sound of the impact of the bodies below.

Tim found us that way, clinging to one another, while Lillian sobbed for the son she had just lost. Tim made his way to the foot of the cliff after he had helped us to one of the benches. When he returned, his solemn face only proved what we already knew. The three of us walked slowly toward the Castle.

"Neil was no coward," I said gently. "When he came face to face with himself, he became the man you always hoped he would be. You may well be proud of him, Lillian, for he proved himself."

"There will be nothing said about Arthur Seaton's hold over Neil or you, Lillian," Tim promised. "Neil gave his life to prevent a cold-blooded murder, and this fact all shall know—and only that—for whatever crime he committed, he atoned for it in far greater measure."

"Thank you," Lillian said quietly.

She dried her tears then and walked with bowed head the rest of the way to Cliffside Castle.

The cloud over Cliffside was gone now. The mysterious dangers were past and before Tim and me lay only happiness and the serenity we desired. There was much to be done with the fortune left to me and, with Tim's help, I knew we would use it for the purposes Aaron and Clara would have ap-

proved of, and for the causes which would have pleased my parents.

As Tim had prophesied, Neil was proclaimed a hero. We buried him in the tomb where Clara lay and, afterwards, Lillian and I walked beside the cliff once again.

"I urge you not to leave Cliffside," I said. "We have need of you here, Lillian. It is your home, after all. When Tim and I are married and our children are born, the house will still be far too huge for us."

"I will stay," she said. "Neil is buried here. Aaron is here, too. Now, I feel that I am a part of Cliffside too. There is much for me to do, much I wish to do."

"You belong here as much as I do," I said.

And so she did, for, over the years, she proved her worth as a friend. Tim and I have our children—three girls and two boys, all of whom Lilliam shamelessly spoils. Tim became a county judge soon after his thirty-fifth birthday, taking the place his father had once occupied with honor.

Virginia Seaton disappeared the day after her brother's death. Their house and lands exist in a state of near decay, a testimonial to the failure of all the evil plans the owners had made.

Lillian is quite famous as a sculptress and she no longer fashions graveyard pieces, but important works of art which are shown in museums. The golden Buddha we sold for its true worth and we sent the money back to China where it would be of help to the people of the mandarin who had originally given it to my missionary father.

Cliffside seems to grow more dear with each pass-

ing season and the memory of those danger-crowded days and nights have long passed away. The corridors and the estate are filled with the shouts and laughter of children.

Cliffside Castle is itself again. May it never revert, may it always be occupied by those of Furnivall blood, for Furnivall blood has been spilled on its stones.

MURDER WON'T WAIT...

Auntie Tang was dead. Mama and Papa were dead. Nancy Furnivall was alone, orphaned...and afraid.

The bright, joyous days were gone. Nancy faced a totally new life...a life of darkness, strangers, and shadows. A life in which there was only one certainty: that one of those strangers was a killer, ready to strike again at any moment. Nancy could not know whether she was scheduled to be the next victim or not...but she knew that she was on the killer's list!

She, and she alone, possessed the only clue to the killer's identity. But she did not know what that clue was—or even that she possessed it...

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